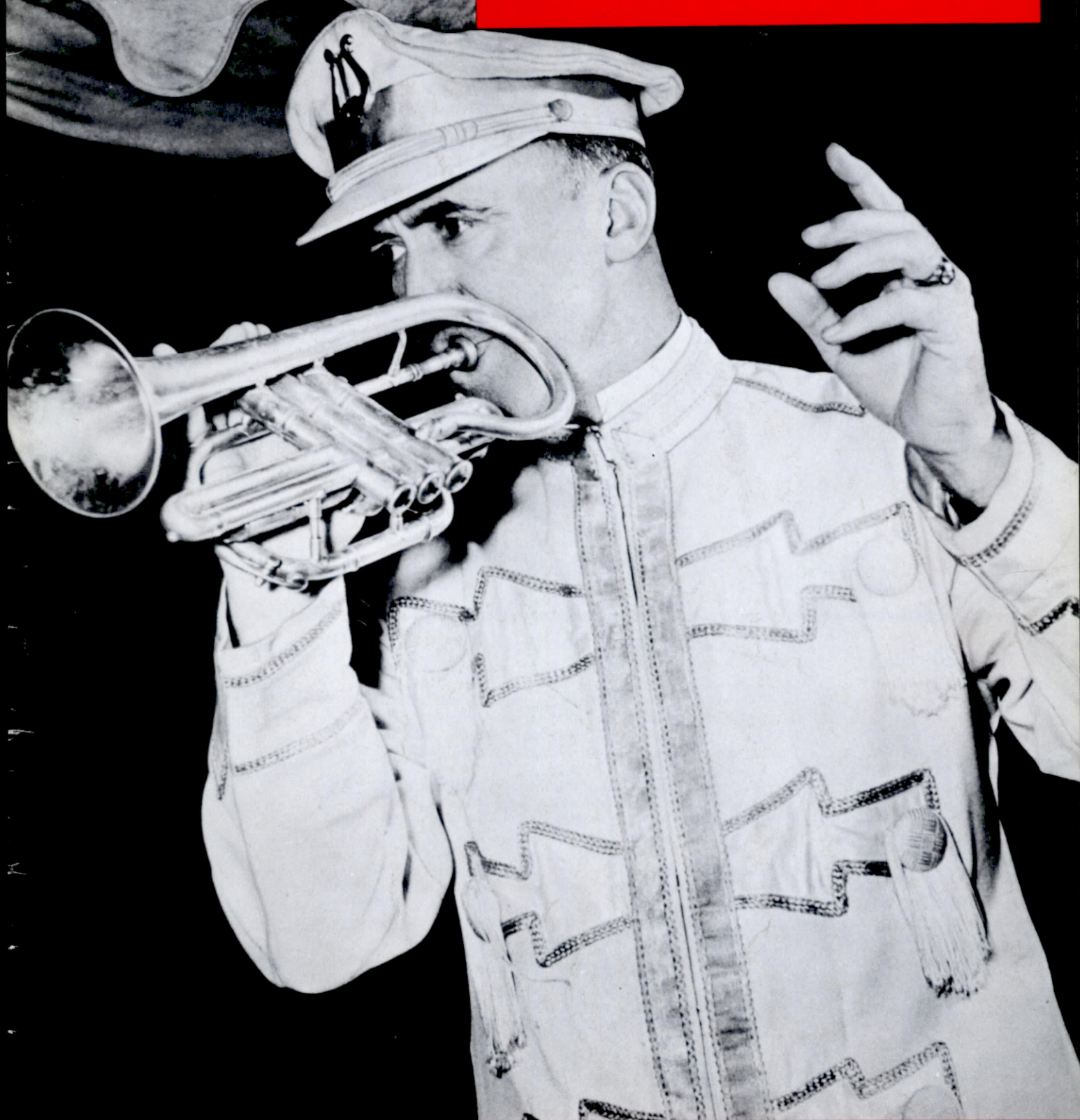


# BANDWAGON



SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER, 1971





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Fred D. Pfening, Jr., Editor

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## THIS MONTH'S COVER

Our cover this issue honors Merle Evans, who for 37 years directed the band on the Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey Circus.

The contribution Evans has made to the playing of circus music will live on forever by way of the many wonderful albums of circus music he has recorded.

This typical photo shows him playing the cornet with one hand and directing with the other. He is sometimes kidded about eating popcorn with a third hand all at the same time. This photo was made in 1953. Pfening Collection.

## SEND CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

For next issue

Those wishing to take advertisements extending Christmas Greetings should send their copy to the Editor by Nov.25th.

## A TRIBUTE TO THE WHITE TOPS EDITOR

The July-August issue of the White Tops magazine, published by the Circus Fans Association, was the last to be edited by Walter B. Hohenadel, of Rochelle, Illinois.

Hohenadel assumed the editorship of the publication following the retirement of his father who had edited the magazine for many years.

During his many years of putting the magazine together it became slicker and more professional in its make up and as the organization grew so grew the circulation of the White Tops, making it the most widely circulated circus publication in the world.

As a labor of love endless hours were spent by Hohenadel to bring pleasure to his readers. The Bandwagon editor, perhaps more than any other person can appreciate the amount of effort required issue after issue.

Our hat is off to you Mr. Editor for a job well done.

To the new editor, who ever he may be, our very best wishes.

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#### CORRECTION ON JACOBS R-B WAGON

A correction. Not that it is too important but just to keep the record straight. About the RBBB baggage wagon TJ got at Peru quarters, show in the top pix on page 16 and mentioned in the text, page 17, middle column last paragraph and continued on 3rd column at top. This was not the wagon Goliath rode on around the track.

There were three wagons associated with Goliath. In 1928 (and maybe in 1929) they had #153 which was 20 ft. long, a flat bed wagon with stakes along the sides & rear end & a seat high up like a jack wagon, it was 7'6" wide. The front part was hinged about in the middle & laid down when Goliath was hauled around the track. The floor was flat. Then in 1929 (or maybe 1930) they built a new wagon to haul Goliath around the track on. This was #151, was also 20 ft. x 7'6" I believe. The floor sloped down toward the rear. It had washboards on the sides & rear end, with gold scrolls painted on them. It had sunburst wheels & spring gear. It had corner posts 6 ft. high and sideboards & end boards that could be put on to close it all in, so the towners could not get a free look at Goliath going between the lot & the runs. This wagon was used for Goliath on Sells-

Floto in '31 & '32 and it was rebuilt into the Frigidaire float for the 1934 H-W parade. The sloping floor was turned around, so it went down toward the front. It was burned at Peru in 1939 I believe it was, when so many wagons were burned.

Then there was #154 which is the wagon shown in the pix and mentioned in your article. It had a "house" built at the front, with up & down ribs just like a baggage wagon, a small door on each side (about like the door on the left side near the front of #13, 30, 38, 50, 105 etc.). A large water pump was inside this part with a big suction hose similar to those used on a fire engine pumper. The rear 10 ft. of the wagon was a flat bed with stakes along the sides & end. This wagon was 16 ft. x 6 ft. The canvas water tank that Goliath stayed in while in the back yard was loaded on the rear portion of this wagon. It too was used on S-F in '31 & '32, thus was at Peru when TJ got it.

Incidentally, #153 remained on RBBB and was used to load the stage sills on, with ring curbs on top of them, while they had the 6 pole top & stages. Later on it hauled other stuff I guess as they changed things so much.

Then the next paragraph in your article makes it sound as if TJ just got those extra long cages at the Peru quarters, which was not exactly the case. He got those two fine old S-F cages with center statues, the Queen's cage & the Wrestler cage, I think they called them. Both were 16 ft. long I believe. He built two completely new cages, out of new hard wood that were around 21 or 22 ft. long. He used the bars (plus other bars) from the S-F cages and also put the carvings on the skyboards & washboards etc. He used a lot of parts from the two S-F cages but the long cages were completely rebuilt jobs.

The cage shown in the upper right pix on page 17 was the first cage TJ had built at his quarters and it sort of looks like a home made job. The two long ones he did next. Then he restored the leopard cage from S-F that is now at the Baraboo Museum. It is about 14 ft. long or so, and not quite as high, or as wide as the other cages. That little Gentry cage he had was real nice.

TJ had the four statues from those cages in the loft of his animal barn & I've often wondered what became of them. C. A. "Cookie" Marsh who was a real good friend of TJ and lived in Peru, admired them & I've wondered if he might have gotten them. He may have put some money in Terrell's show. He and his wife Betty may or may not still be living. But their son Jack ought to be around somewhere, as he was about 20 in 1942 I'd say. I bet Chappie Fox would like those statues for the Museum.

—Gordon M. Potter

#### CIRCUS ITEMS FOR CHRISTMAS — THEY KEEP ON GIVING \* \* \* \*

"MR. CIRCUS, The Story of Chas. T. Hunt" by John Cloutman. 352 pages of fine print, 20 pages of pictures, telling the story of Hunt Bros. Circus from its founding in 1892 to year of book publication 1954. A new copy . . . \$3.50

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# CHORDS AND CUES

By Sverre O. Braathen



Not until Thomas Coates made his appearance as the first director of circus bands in this country was there a change in their instrumentation. Mr. Coates was born in New York about 1818. He became a skilled French horn player with the famous Dodworth Band of New York City. Thomas Coates was a versatile musician and together with Patrick S. Gilmore, C. S. Graffulla and Allen Dodworth revolutionized the instrumentation of bands, making it possible for them to play the best in concert music. Through their efforts the keyed bugle was discarded and cornets took the place of these.

Probably the greatest master of the keyed bugle was Edward ("Ned") Kendall, born at Newport, Rhode Island on March 20, 1808. While a youngster he joined the army where he vied with his brother, James J., as a fifer and drummer. After a time Ned discarded the fife and drum for the keyed bugle of which he became passionately fond. He seemed never to wear of seeking to improve his technique in the use of this instrument, and his mastery of it made him one of the popular idols of his day. Kendall possessed the same power and endurance that Merle Evans exhibited on the cornet. Ned could sustain the high notes longer and had a faster tongue than any other bugler, and his playing was sweet and clear. It was said that he alone could drown out an entire band during a street parade.

When Ned Kendall directed the band on Spalding's North American Circus in 1842 he was given top publicity both in the newspapers and in the shows advertising. The following is one example of this advertising:

## KENDALL'S BRASS BAND

fifteen picked musician, in lustrous uniforms of a celebrity in both hemispheres to which no other band aspires, led by the immortal EDWARD KENDALL, whose fame as the MAGIC BUGLAR has penetrated every circle to which music has access, at once gives tone to the pure and admirable amusements of the monster circus, whether in leading the IMMENSELY EX-

TENDED PROCESSION IN THE GORGEOUS COLOSSAL MUSIC CAR ar awakening the echoes of the streets while mounted on 15 richly eaparisoned steeds, or metamorphosing performance into a

## SOIRE MUSICALE

not the least attractive feature in which will be the never-to-be-forgotten

## SOLO UPON HIS MAGIC SILVER BUGLE

For many years the John Robinson Circus was one of the foremost tented shows in this country. In its early days it did not have a brass band but depended upon a lone fiddler to provide the music for the performance. There were days when the fiddler was conspicuous by his absence, and the manager had to utilize an old and out of tune organ to provide the music. When John Robinson was satisfied that his circus was on a sound financial foundation he decided the enlarged and im-

Joseph J. Richards, Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows bandleader from 1912 to 1919. Author's Collection.



proved performance needed something more than a lone fiddler or a decrepit organ to build the acts to their full potentials as entertainment. He went to New York and engaged a brass band and knowing of the great reputation of Edward Kendall, signed him to a contract as its first director.

Eager to hear his new acquisition, Robinson hovered near the bandstand for the first rehearsal. He swelled with pride when, in the very first number, Kendall cut loose on his bugle with tremendous power. When the director took the bugle from his lips for a brief rest, Robinson whirled and yelled at Kendall, "Why aren't you playing?" Kendall replied, "Can't, — I've got a twenty bar rest." "Go on and play. You can rest when the rehearsal is over," shouted Robinson.

On December 16, 1856 Patrick S. Gilmore and his famed band were to give a concert in Mechanic Hall in Boston. Gilmore had captured the popular fancy with his cornet wizardry and he thought it would add spice to the program if he invited Kendall to appear with the band on this occasion. As the astute Gilmore had probably foreseen, when it became generally known that the noted bugler and the famous cornetist were to appear on the same program, a good deal of interest was aroused among the admirers of each, with much good natured banter as to which man was the greater artist. A popular selection, **Wood Up Quickstep**, was chosen as one which would give each an opportunity to exhibit his virtuosity. As each played alternately their listeners felt a fervor of excitement grip them. Each soloist was greeted with enthusiastic and heartwarming applause and neither was torn from the pedestal to which his idolatrous followers had elevated him.

Wood Up Quick Step is now available on a band recording called Greatest Band In The Land! The Goldman Band, Capital Record No. P8631. This is an excellent band record with a many good numbers on it.

Kendall was bandmaster on the Nixon and Kemp Circus for a time before his death, which occurred in Boston on October 28, 1861.



Two other well known musicians went from the Boston area to the John Robinson Circus. They were Tom Canhan and his protegee, David Wallis Reeves. Canhan established a reputation both as a teacher of music and a band director. He directed the John Robinson band in 1863 and again during the seasons from 1866 to 1869, inclusive. As a young boy Reeves lived with Canhan and received his early musical instruction from the latter. Reeves played with Canhan in both circus and minstrel show bands and became an excellent cornet soloist. It is believed that he was the first musician to perfect the art of triple tonguing on the cornet. For a number of years he was the director and cornet soloist of The American Band of Providence which at that time was one of the leading bands in this country. Upon the death of Patrick S. Gilmore in St. Louis on September 24, 1892, he was requested by the members of this great band to become its director which he did for a short time. Reeves was a terrific composer of music and his best known and always played march being entitled *The Second Connecticut National Guard*.

With the opening of the Ringling Bros. Circus but a month away, the five brothers were suddenly confronted with the problem of locating a capable band director because of the unexpected death of George Ganweiler at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on March 1, 1909. Between 1888 and 1896 Ganweiler had directed bands on such major circuses as Sells Bros., and Adam Forepaugh. In 1896 he became the band director of the Ringling Bros. circus where he stayed for the ten years of life that remained to him. Ganweiler was a good cornet player and soloist and a competent arranger, and he made the Ringling band one of the leading circus organizations in this country.

Being musicians in their own right and having had their band fronted by as competent a leader as Ganweiler, the Ringlings were determined to find as able a successor. Several men were given consideration, and Albert C. Sweet was selected. He was an easterner, born in Dansville, New York on July 7, 1876. Sweet's father had played violin and his mother piano so he was not without a musical background. At the age of fourteen he picked up an old, battered Eb cornet, and it captured his fancy completely. In fact, the neighbors at times expressed displeasure with the lad's practicing on this instrument through much of the day and into the night. Sweet had the good fortune to meet W. Paris Chambers, who took a liking to the curly haired boy and without remuneration gave him cornet lessons. Chambers was given credit by Sweet for his successful musical career. At the age of eighteen Al concluded that if he were to follow music as a



Carl Clair directed the band on the Barnum & Bailey Circus from 1893 to 1906. Author's Collection.

profession it was important that he leave the narrow confines of his home town. To this end he joined Stowe Bros. Circus and Wild West Show. In making this selection he was again fortunate, for Mont Long, the band director, was a highly capable bandmaster and gave young Sweet excellent training. Later he played cornet with the John Robinson Circus, the Great Wallace Show and, in Cuba, with the Circo Pullibones. His first experience in directing came when he was with the Scribner and Smith Circus for four years. Sweet played cornet with the Guy Bros. and with the Arthur Deming Minstrel Shows, and with the Harrison J. Wolfe, and the Clotus Sisters Dramatic companies.

Al. Sweet succeeded his teacher, W. Paris Chambers, as cornet soloist for the Edison Phonograph Company and also did recordings for Columbia, Victor and other companies. He organized his first band in 1900 in Newark, New Jersey and became the band and orchestra director for the Edison Company.

In reviewing the opening performance of the 1906 Ringling season in Chicago, *The Billboard* on April 14, said:

"The Ringling Brother's Military Band has always been accorded the distinction of being a high-class musical organization. Under the direction of the late George Ganweiler, who was identified with the Ringling show continuously from 1896 until his death, this winter, the band improved every year until it is now looked upon as the leading circus organization of the country. Albert C. Sweet is the new director. He is a leader of unquestioned ability, and will undoubtedly uphold the high standard which his predecessor maintained. The preliminary concerts, at the Coliseum, are a musical treat. The big

program is an education in popular music."

On leaving the Ringling Show following the 1911 season he accepted the position of director of the Denver Municipal Band and also played cornet solos with the band. Shortly before World War I he organized the famous and well known White Hussar's Singing Band. For twenty years this was a headline attraction on the chautauqua circuits of this country, and Mr. Sweet became known as "Mr. Chautauqua."

It was said of Sweet by all musicians who knew him that his was million dollar personality. He was extremely well liked by his own musicians because of his winning personality, his musicianship, and the fact that he always fought for the best possible living conditions and salaries for his men. Following a long and brilliant musical career, Al Sweet died in Chicago on May 12, 1945 at the age of sixty-nine.

Three of the all time great circus musicians hailed from a narrow, closely knit area of our country, extending in an almost straight line from Columbus, Kansas northerly through Pittsburgh, Kansas, and on up to Nevada (formerly Nevada City), Missouri. Merle Evans came from Columbus, J. J. ("Jack") Richards from Pittsburgh, and Russell Alexander from Nevada City.

Joseph John Richards was born at Cwmavon, Wales on August 27, 1878 and was brought to the United States by his parents when he was four. His first musical instruction was given him by a local teacher and he played alto in his home town band. At the age of fifteen he began playing trombone but after experimenting with this instrument for a year he abandoned it for the cornet which he played the rest of his life. Mr. Richards gained his first professional experience with a musical and comedy company. Upon returning home he accepted an invitation to serve as director of the local band without remuneration. This afforded him the opportunity to study harmony with a local organist.

In 1897, the same year that the youthful Russell Alexander went to Europe as a member of the Barnum & Bailey Circus band and Al. Sweet was playing solo cornet with the Great Wallace Show band, Jack Richards became the director of the band on the Norton-Jones Circus. He remained with this show until the 1902 season when he signed a contract with the Josh Spruceby Company. Later he played with the Dickson Humpty Dumpty and with the Plunkard shows. His first experience with a major circus came in 1906 when he signed to play first chair solo cornet on the Adam Forepaugh-Sells Bros. Circus under the direction of John H. Gill. When he became a member of the cornet section on the Barnum & Bailey Circus he met Frederick Alton Jewell, the di-





rector and brilliant composer. When the Ringling Bros. returned their Forepaugh-Sells Circus to the road for the 1910 and 1911 seasons Jack Richards became the director.

In 1912 he took over the direction of the Ringling Bros. Circus band and continued in this position until the merger of this show with the Barnum & Bailey Circus in the spring of 1919. Mr. Richards was not interested in directing the band on the Ringling-Barnum Circus.

For a number of years the Long Beach Municipal Band had been one of the leading concert bands in this nation. Many musicians who trouped with circus bands have been among its members. At one time the peerless cornet soloist, Herbert L. Clarke, was director of this band, and Jack Richards was its conductor from 1945 through 1950. He was a skilled and thorough musician, greatly respected and admired by all who had the privilege of playing under his baton. He was past president of the American Band Masters Association.

Most composers of circus music came from the bass section of circus bands, but this was not true of J. J. Richards, H. A. Vandercook and W. Paris Chambers, all cornet players. Among his better known compositions are his **Emblem of Unity**, **The Great Plains**, **Celebrity**, and **Wichita Beacon** and his galops, — **In Fretta**, **Con Celerita** and **Geneva**. Richards seems not to have been known by the appellation "Jack" by his musicians, perhaps because he always penned the name of J. J. Richards to compositions. He died in Memorial Hospital, Long Beach, California on March 16, 1956 at the age of seventy-seven.

In its memorable history of forty-eight years, dating from its birth in 1871 until the merger with the Ringling Bros. Circus in the spring of 1919, the Barnum & Bailey Circus featured outstanding bands. Fritz Hartman was the first director of this circus band, serving from 1871 through 1875. Joseph Withers directed the band the following five years. James S. Robinson had the distinction of being the first band leader to direct a Barnum & Bailey band in both the United States and England,

Al C. Sweet is shown with his band on the Ringling show in 1911. Author's Collection.

the latter when this circus played the Olympia in London in the winter of 1889-1890. His tenure spanned the seasons from 1881 through 1892. He directed the band on the Royal English Circus and the German Water Carnival in Chicago during the winter seasons of 1894 and 1895, with the temperamental and conceited Jules Levy featured in brilliant cornet solos.

Carl G. Clair, who succeeded James S. Robinson as director of the Barnum band, was born in Lisbon, Iowa on January 1, 1868. He was but sixteen years old when he became a member of the band on the J. T. Johnson Circus in 1884, the same year that saw the tenuous beginnings of the Ringling Bros. Circus. He directed the band on the well known King and Franklin Circus from 1887 until midseason of 1892 when he left to accept a position in the cornet section of the Barnum & Bailey band. On the former show he was fortunate in having among his musicians several who had experience in leading concert bands.

Clair became the band master of the Barnum & Bailey Show at the start of the 1893 season, a position he held through 1906, making the five year tour of Great Britain and the Continent with this organization. He was to have been the director in 1907 and the programs lists him as the director but the route book issued at the end of the season shows that Walter P. English directed the band in the 1907 season. Clair was stricken with an illness after the programs were printed and he never recovered from the illness. He died in Stanford, Connecticut on April 28, 1911 at the age of forty-three.

Walter P. English, who had been a bass player with the band for a number of years, succeeded Clair at the start of the 1907 season. It is doubtful if any other circus musician had more frustrations before he became established on a major show than did Mr. English. Born in Salt Lake City, Utah on March 20, 1867, he spent four years of his boyhood in Dallas, Texas. At the age of seven-

teen he was a bass player with the Alfalfa Band at San Bernardino, California and went from there to San Francisco where he had experience with a number of amateur bands. English began his professional life in 1891 by signing a contract to play with the band on the Great New York Circus in Oakland, California. The following season he trouped with the Mc Mahon Circus. His fortunes seemed to reach their nadir during the 1893 season and had he been a less resolute mortal he might have abandoned circus life as a career for a musician. During that year he played in nine different circus bands and at the end of the season laughingly remarked that he considered himself lucky to have enough money to pay for his laundry.

English could not shake the sawdust out of his shoes, much less out of his heart, and signed up with the band on the Howe and Cushing Circus for the 1894 season. In 1895 he paid his train fare to Birmingham, Alabama to join out with the Sends and Astley Circus. Playing bass with the Nickle Plate Circus the next season he found himself a colleague of William F. Ludwig, the master of drums who was covered in the story of Circus Wind Jammers.

After seeing much of America as a stranded circus bass player for several years, English must have welcomed the opportunity in 1897 to journey as a member of the Barnum & Bailey Band to Europe. Regular pay days were his as during the next five years this circus toured Great Britain and the Continent. With greater financial security his he was free to devote more time and energy to perfecting his musicianship and composing. It is interesting to note that the Circus World Museum has in manuscript a number by English called **Battle Music**. Years later English wrote his famous march **Royal Decree** and it is the same music as the number in manuscript called **Battle Music**. Possibly it was used in the Barnum & Bailey program. Mr. English remained with "The Greatest Show on Earth" through the 1908 season and was its bandmaster in 1907. He returned to California as a bass player with the Norris and Rowe Circus for the 1909 season. He was a musician with the Sells Floto Circus in 1911, and H. H. Tammen installed him as the director for the following year. That season brought together two outstanding musicians and composers, — Walter P. English, the bass player, and Karl L. King, playing baritone in the same band. These talented men became fast friends. English wrote his great march **The Royal Decree**, and dedicated it to King, and Karl wrote his **Garland Entree March** and inscribed it to Walter. When King became the director of the Sells-Floto Band in 1914, English was one of his bass players.

English was considered one of the



leading band directors for both concert music and circus programs and is conceded to be one of the finest bass players to troupe with circuses. During the time he was with the Sells-Floto Circus he played bass with the Frederick N. Innes Band in Denver in the off season. Innes was one of the greatest trombone players and soloists of all time. English was a good composer of circus music with such marches as **Royal Decree**, the **Girl of the Eagle Ranch**, and **Salute to Alexander Clair's Triumph** and **Beyond the Rockies** and his galops, — **Wild Fire** and **Mile a Minute**.

The Sells-Floto Circus was showing in Norwood, Ohio on June 8, 1916 when Karl L. King received a wire that Walter P. English had died at the Denver City Hospital on June 4. For the center ring concert that evening Karl led his band through a program comprised exclusively of Mr. English's compositions, — a tribute to his friend.

Frederick Alton Jewell, who succeeded Walter P. English as the band director on the great Barnum & Bailey Circus at the start of the 1908 season, was born in Worthington, Indiana, on May 28, 1875. Worthington remained his home, and he established his own music publishing house in that city. Like so many circus musicians, Mr. Jewell was to a large extent self-trained. He obtained his high school education in his home town and began his musical training as a member of the family band, with his father and three brothers and sisters.

For many years it was said around circus lots that if a musician had succeeded with Gentry Bros. Circus his reputation as a bandsman was established. In 1899 Jewell became a member of the Gentry Bros. band and he remained with this Show for three years. He paid tribute to the high quality of Gentry bands with his great bandwagon march, **Gentry's Triumphal**.

When in the spring of 1902 he joined the Ringling Bros. Circus it gave to that band two of the all time great circus baritone players, Frederick Alton Jewell and Charles Sanglear. For the 1905 and 1906 seasons, Jewell did double duty with the Sells-Floto Circus, playing the steam calliope for the street parades and baritone with the band for the center ring concerts and performance. In 1907 he returned to the Ringling show. When that fall the Ringlings purchased the Barnum & Bailey Circus they asked Mr. Jewell to direct the band. He consented and remained in that capacity for three years. During the 1916 and the 1917 seasons he led the excellent large bands for the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus.

Mr. Jewell found it more advantageous to play the cornet when directing, but musicians are agreed that he never mastered this instrument as he did the baritone. He finally abandoned

the tanbark trail for the more settled life of director of the Indianapolis Shrine Band, remaining with that organization until his death on February 11, 1936 when he was not quite sixty-one years old.

Frederick Alton Jewell possessed a "heart of gold," a warm smile, and always greeted a friend with a crushing handshake. Musicians who played with his held him in high esteem, and he never failed to defend them against any and all infringements of their rights. In the circus world he ranks very high in all three categories, — as a musician, director and composer. Among his best compositions must be listed his marches, **High and Mighty**, **The Screamer**, **Quality Plus**, **Battle Royal**, **E. Pluribus Union**, **Officer of the Guard**, and **Pag-eant of Progress**, and his galops **Magnet**, **Skiddo**, **Whirlwind**, **They're Off** and **Galop Go**. His **Waltz Crimson Petal**, is one of the most beautiful waltzes ever written and has been used many times for the flying-and-return trapeze act, and his **Trombone Blues** is a parental favorite with circus bands. At the time of his death Jewell was a member of the American Bandmasters Association.

On two occasions the Ringling brothers went to a minstrel show to obtain a band director and in each instance selected a cornetist who could "sting them high, long and loud." The first of these was Edwin ("Ned") Brill, a competent musician who never achieved mastery of the art of directing a circus band. This may be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that all his prior experience had been playing with minstrel or the so-called "Car Shows" that were strictly theatrical. These shows stressed the street concert which was staged solely for publicity purposes. That training was quite different that that required for good circus work, as Brill was to discover. He had played with some of the best of the minstrel shows,

Walter P. English is pictured in the white uniform with his band on the Sells-Floto Circus in 1912. Author's Collection.



including Al. G. Fields, Guy Bros. and "Honey Boy" Evans. He went directly from the Honey Boy Show to the Barnum & Bailey Circus in the spring of 1911.

There Brill was confronted with the necessity of cueing a rapid and ever changing performance where the arenic artist demanded the proper music to supplement, highlight, and build his or her work to a climax. Brill never achieved the ability to make the transition from one musical number to another quickly enough to satisfy the circus performers, and there was constant complaint as to this. Whether playing a center ring concert or the performance proper the music cannot be played in a stereotyped manner nor yet in the pattern of a dance hall. Circus music must capture and reflect the atmosphere of sawdust and spangles, daring feats and kaleidoscopic changes. Brill was extremely fortunate in having the assistance of Cleveland Dayton, an expert trombone player, in laying out the music for the performance and in helping with the cueing itself.

Joseph M. Egan was a member of both the Sweet band on the Ringling Show and the Brill band on the Barnum Circus. He made a comparison of the two in **The Billboard** of October 14, 1933: "I was a member of Ned Brill's Band season of 1911, the first year Brill was with the Barnum Show. We opened in Madison Square Garden on March 23. The band had 35 men.

"During the season of 1910, I was a member of Al. Sweet's Band on the Ringling Show, also a 35 piece band. I feel that I am in a position to make a fair comparison between the two bands. All Sweet's Band was a well drilled, smooth working, closely knitted unit of seasoned and experienced circus musicians. The instrumentation was carefully studied and strictly adhered to. It was backed by a large library of all the standard compositions and many of the classics.

"On the other hand, Brill's band was of an entirely different character. Brill had never played with a circus band be-



fore; many of these men were breaking into the business their first season out. Some were from "Tom" and minstrel shows, not more than 12 of these men had had circus experience, and our library was extremely limited. Brill's Band was a noisy outfit. Many musicians claimed it was just two minstrel bands joined together. For example Brill's New York opening had nine cornets, five trombones and five horns. Sweet had oboe, bassoon and bass clarinet and two saxophones, while Brill did not have one of these instruments."

Brill, however, was kindly, and his men liked him despite the fact that they were well aware of his limited musical knowledge. He was a big man, weighing 215 pounds and possessed great power on the cornet. He could play the high notes long and loud but at the cost of great effort. A musician in his band once remarked, "He'd go after them and most of the time get them, but I was always afraid that he'd die of over exertion before he got through." He directed the bands on the Barnum & Bailey Circus from 1911 through 1916 but he never was the equal of Sweet, English, Jewell, King or Evans.

Ned Brill was "a jolly good fellow," a great spender and a poker addict. The big men in the business, sports and amusement world were his buddies at cards and became fond of him. He died in the Soldiers Home Hospital in Los Angeles, California on June 22, 1923 and was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in Santa Monica in that state. It may be of interest to note here that he is often referred to as Edwin S. Brill, and his death certificate bears that middle initial, but he always signed his name Edwin H.

America, which nearly two centuries ago freed itself of monarchs, can yet boast a King who is a prince. All who have worked with and known Karl L. King, and their names are legion, characterize him as a "Prince." Our "monarch" was born in Paintersville, Green County, Ohio on February 21, 1891. In 1916 he married Ruth Lovett of Canton, Ohio, and they have one son, Karl L. Jr.

Two weeks before the Barnum & Bailey Circus was to open the 1917 season in Madison Square Garden in New York City, Karl L. King received from the Ringling brothers an urgent request to accept the leadership of the Barnum & Bailey band. As bandmaster of the Sells-Floto Show he had promised himself to retire from the circus world at the close of the 1916 season that he might have more time for study and composing. When he received the urgent wire from the Ringlings he was at first torn by conflicting desires. It had each day become more apparent that the United States could not much longer escape involvement in the war then raging in Europe. Karl knew that that would quickly and seriously deplete



Frederick A. Jewell was bandleader on the Barnum & Bailey Circus from 1908 to 1910. Author's Collection

band rosters. Keeping a circus band intact through the normal season presented problems enough. King recognized that could become a near impossibility in war times. Then, too, there remained but two weeks to organize and rehearse a band of the caliber the Barnum Show required.

Prince that he was, King agreed to do what he could. He immediately procured the list of the acts for the 1917 program and proceeded to select the music that would be needed. He sent wires to several scores of experienced

Karl L. King is known as the "Prince of Marches" writing his greatest march "Barnum & Bailey's Favorite" at the age of 22. Author's Collection.



musicians and succeeded in signing a group of the leading circus musicians in this country. King's reputation as a bandmaster was in itself a magnet that attracted competent men, and playing in the band of "The Greatest Show on Earth" helped to establish a musician in the circus world.

Fortunately for Karl, his wife, Ruth, was a good calliope player, and when the band's ranks were thinned at times because of the demand of the military services she was able to lend much needed support. When the Circus opened in the Garden that spring the band was a credit to King and to the Barnum & Bailey Show.

Karl L. King is recognized as one of the most prolific composers of band music in this country, which adds interest to the fact that he is largely self trained. He acquired some musical knowledge from various local band directors and from William E. Strasner of Canton, Ohio. His formal education in music consisted of four lessons on the piano and a few on the baritone. He is entirely self-taught in harmony and composition. He read a few books on harmony but never adhered to established rules when composing. He had long been an exponent of the theory that a composer if he would be original must conceive his own arrangement of notes, — arrangements which are pleasing to the ear. He began composing at the age of thirteen but late pronounced these early efforts "awful junk." There is one thing that can be said about all of King's composition and that is that they are all very melodious. Some fifty or sixty of King's compositions have been placed on band recordings.

C. L. Barnhouse of Oskaloosa, Iowa published virtually everything that Karl wrote in his early years. King has always looked upon Mr. Barnhouse as his friend and benefactor and in 1919 dedicated his popular March, **Fame and Fortune**, to the publisher.

Mr. King's first band experience came as a member of The Thayer Regimental Band of Canton, Ohio. With characteristic modesty in later years he remarked, "You can just bet my baritone playing at that time did not set the world on fire." His first professional playing came with the Neddermyer Concert Band of Columbus, Ohio. In 1911 Karl wrote his **Neddermyer Triumphal March** and dedicated it to the conductor, Fred Neddermyer. Not long after he joined the band of the Soldiers Home in Danville, Illinois and here he played both baritone and bass. It was no doubt because of his playing with this band he wrote his **Sons of Veterans March**.

It was while a member of this Soldiers Home Band that Karl was first bitten by the "circus bug." He signed for the 1910 season to play baritone under Woody Van, conductor of the band on the Robinson Famous Circus. Like all



troubadours, circus musicians have many experiences they never forget. King had many that he cherished, one of the most vivid occurring on this trip to join out with his first circus. He missed connections at Emporia, Kansas and discovered he was out of money. Stranded thus, he was in a quandry as to what to do when he chanced to meet up with a petty grafter who had both a prison record and a big heart. This n'er-do-well furnished King with a meal and with money for his train fare to Eureka, Kansas, where he caught up with the circus.

Karl learned many lessons in that first year of trouping,—one that pay days on the Robison Famous Circus were quite unpredictable. The virus injected into his veins by the circus bug proved to be of a virulent strain, however, and he stayed with the Show until December second when it played Grenada, Mississippi. He considered himself fortunate to have been paid in full for this first year of circus trouping. This, his First-of-May season inspired him to write his first galop and his march, **Ponderoso**.

Despite his rugged experiences with the Robison Famous Circus, the sawdust continued to course through Karl's veins and he signed on with the Yankee Robinson Circus for the 1911 season as a baritone player. This band, too, was directed by Woody Van (his correct name was Appolos Woodring Van Anda). This year Mr. King directed a band for the first time during a temporary absence of Mr. Van. Yankee Robinson's pay days were less irregular than those on the Robison Famous Circus, but the cookhouse left so much to be desired that King finally harkened to the dictates of his youthful stomach and left the Show. Three marches resulted from this years trouping, — **Woody Van's**, **Robinson's Grand Entree** and **Wanderlust**.

The year 1912 found King playing under the baton of Walter P. English in the Sells-Floto Band. Demanding as this was of both time and energy, Karl yet composed **Homestretch Galop**, the **Overture Princess of India**, and that beautiful serenade, **A Night In June**. He continued up the circus ladder and in 1913 played baritone with the Barnum & Bailey Band under the direction of Ned Brill. These two gifted musicians became fast friends, and King that year wrote his greatest march, **Barnum & Bailey's Favorite** and dedicated it to his conductor. King was then but twenty-two years of age. This march brought to him the same fame that **Stars and Stripes Forever** brought to John Philip Sousa and **On The Mall** brought to Edwin Franko Goldman.

King's outstanding talents had attracted the attention of H. H. Tammen, one of the owners of the Sells-Floto Circus, and in 1914 he engaged Karl as

director of that Show's fine band where he remained for three years. Because of his association with the Sells-Floto Circus he wrote **On The War Path**, and **Indian War Dance**, **Passing of the Redman** and **Sells Floto Triumphal** march.

It is a rare occasion that a president of the United States is permitted to attend a circus. Between near-overwhelming work schedules and security precautions this amusement seems to be denied to our chief magistrate. So when on May 7, 1918 Pres. and Mrs. Woodrow Wilson attended the evening performance of "The Greatest Show on Earth" King and his band considered it a distance honor to play the music that escorted the presidential party to their elaborately decorated box. It may be of interest to state here that the Circus had a turnaway that night, grossing \$23,499.85 for the day despite threatening weather.



Merle Evans is shown as a member of the band on the Buffalo Bill-101 Ranch Wild West in 1916. Evans is on the extreme right of the second row. Author's Collection.

When the Ringling and Barnum Shows were merged in the spring of 1919, Mr. King was at last free to realize his earlier plans for bidding farewell to the circus world that he might devote more time to study and composing and to his home life. He returned to Canton, Ohio to become the conductor of the Grand Army Band, then known as "Mc Kinleys" Own.

In 1920 the Kings moved to Ft. Dodge, Iowa where Karl became the director of the Ft. Dodge Municipal Band, a position he held until the date of his death. With this band he played the Iowa State Fair for more than forty years together with many other fairs throughout the State. He also established a music busi-

ness in Ft. Dodge where he filled innumerable orders for his own and the compositions of other composers. He has written something over 260 marches, galops, rags, overtures and other numbers, including marches for most of the Universities in the Big Ten and for many other colleges and universities in this country. More of his compositions have been played by circus bands than those of any other composer. Ask any circus musician and the chances are he will tell you he likes Karl's music the best of all the composers who wrote music for this amusement institution. His compositions capture the true essence of the circus. Not only is Karl's music played by all Circus bands but by all school and university bands and municipal bands in this country and all over the world.

King joined the Musicians Union in Amarillo, Texas and was elected to

membership in the American Bandmasters Association at its first convention in 1930. He was not only a past president of this select group but was also an honorary life president. He had been a guest conductor of a large number of school, municipal and college and university bands in the United States. Mr. King was a most genial individual, extremely well liked by those who knew him. You could have walked on any street in Ft. Dodge with Karl or gone into any eating or public place with him and found that he was known by every person in Ft. Dodge regardless of the age of the person.

Many and varied honors were bestowed upon him. On October 28, 1951 the people of the State of Iowa gave him a testimonial dinner in Des Moines, attended by notables from the nation, the state, and the movie industry. Among the gifts presented to him on this occasion Karl especially cherished



a plaque upon which was inscribed:

**KARL L. KING**

who as today's foremost composer of band music has brought international renown to America and Iowa; has inspired millions of young musicians; has dignified the profession of bandmaster; has especially endeared himself to his own community and State; and has added immeasurably to the musical art and culture of Western civilization.

(signed) **THE CITIZENS OF IOWA**

The citizens of Ft. Dodge provided him with one of the outstanding band shells in this country, erected in a large park that was filled on a summer's night with music lovers from far and near. In the fall of 1960 a new Ft. Dodge bridge was named for King with elaborate dedication ceremonies. So many honors have been bestowed on Karl that it is out of the question to mention all of them.

"Prince" King might well have been by such other sobriquets as "Mr. Ft. Dodge," "Mr. Iowa," or "Mr. Band Music." Had not John Philip Sousa been dubbed "The March King", because of his **Washington Post March**, this cognomen could rightfully have been bestowed on Karl L. King.

In the fall of 1970 The Band of Her Majesty's Life Guards recorded an album of all Karl L. King compositions. Karl was honored by having this album given the name of Salute to Karl King. It has several marches that are not found on any other record.

In January 1971 Karl had the misfortune of having his large private library destroyed in a fire. Much other band property was also destroyed as well as the band's practice hall. Meredith Willson came to his rescue and loaned him his private band library.

Karl L. King was taken to Bethesda General Hospital at 1:15 Tuesday afternoon following a sudden illness and passed away at 5:55 A.M. Wednesday March 31, 1971. Mr. King directed his Ft. Dodge Municipal Band for the last time in a St. Patrick's Day concert in Corpus Christi Paris Center, on March 14. In this concert Karl played for the first time "76 Trombones" from the music library that Meredith Willson loaned him after Karl's disastrous fire on January 12.

Meredith Willson paid the following tribute to Karl:

"Muffle the drum-mate the brasses.

"Iowa has lost her royal son, King of band music.

"Our famous Karl is, no doubt, already at work forming choirs of angles into heavenly bands with the smiling approval of John Phillip Sousa."

Following the services in the First Congregational Church on April 4, 1971 he was laid to rest in The North Lawn Cemetery. Karl left him surviving his

widow, Ruth, a son, Karl L. Jr., a granddaughter, a great grand-son and a great-granddaughter.

If the musical Ringling brothers were not too happy in their choice of "Minstrel Man Brill" to direct their Barnum & Bailey Band in 1911, surely they must have been elated with "Minstrel Man Merle" whom they chose in 1919 to lead the band on their newly merged Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Unlike Brill Merle at least had experience in cueing a wild west show for two seasons. Whereas Ned Birill had been the slowest of their directors to pick up cues for the performance, Merle Evans proved to be the fastest.

Merle Evans who led with his left and played with his right, has been blowing a cornet since he was nine years old. He was born at Columbus, Kansas on December 26, 1892. He played with a "kid" band there and from the first exhibited unusual talents. Without the benefit of formal musical training or education he ventured into the professional field at the age of sixteen when he joined the eight piece band on the S. W. Brundage Shows, a carnival. There he followed the traditional pattern of those days, helping to put up and take down the show's merry-go-round and the black tent used for the flickering movies, in addition to playing his cornet in the band. Merle likes to relate that his salary was \$10.00 a week but no "cakes" or bunk. He remarked that since board and room cost about \$1.00 per day he had \$3.00 of money worth at a minimum 100 cents to the dollar left to clothe himself and satisfy a few youthful whims. With the closing of the Brundage Shows that autumn at Salina, Kansas Merle was confronted with the necessity of finding a job that would enable him to earn a living. He recalls that on Thanksgiving

Merle Evans is the only man to conduct center ring concerts on the Ringling-Barnum Circus. He is shown here with his 1926 band in the center ring at Madison Square Garden. Pfening Collection.

Day that year he was playing with a Salvation Army band on the streets of Salina, happy to blare fourth with exuberant energies on his cornet. But there came a day when the Salvation Army commander announced that the nights had grown too cold for street concerts, and Merle had found no demand for his musicianship, so he went to work as a driver of a milk wagon.

When the grass began to green and the buds to swell on the trees Merle harkened again to the call of the road and returned to the band on the Brundage Shows. Following the close of his third season with the carnival it was not necessary for him to return to the milk wagon route for he had learned that the Cotton Blossom Show Boat needed a cornet player. He still recalls with pleasure that winter of tramping via the river route, but spring found him ready to make a change and he signed with Murphy's Comedians for for the 1911 and 1912 seasons. The spring of 1913 found him back with the Brundage Shows playing under the baton of Cleve Pullen. This director recognized Merle's exceptional talents and undertook to help the twenty-year old youth to develop these, telling him that if he would practice diligently and accept advice and instruction from Pullen the leadership of the band on "The Greatest Show on Earth" could someday fall to Evans. To direct the famous band of the Barnum & Bailey Circus seemed a distinct goal, indeed, but Merle recognized the sincerity and soundness of Cleve Pullen's advice and followed it. Given more opportunity to play cornet, he remained on the Brundage Shows through the 1915 season.

Merle's reputation as a musician was spreading and the spring of 1916 brought him the opportunity to direct the band on; the Buffalo Bill-101 Ranch Wild West Show. He accepted and remained two seasons. It was a time when there was tremendous competition for good musicians by circuses and carnivals, minstrel shows and theaters. Gus Hill's Minstrels found themselves in need of a cornet player capable of di-





recting its band and approached Merle with contract he felt he could not refuse. It was the hey day of minstrel shows, and thousands of Americans saw and heard Gus Hill's new cornetist director and marveled at his wizardry on that instrument.

On February 23, 1918 *The Billboard* commented: "Merle Evans, the past season leader with Jess Willard Buffalo Bill Shows, it at present band leader of the Gus Hill Minstrels, which played Cincinnati last week, serenaded *The Billboard* last Saturday. Evans has a wonderful musical organization in his minstrel band, and his cornet playing was the marvel of those musically informed in Cincinnati." And again on March 9, 1918 *The Billboard* in a column, "Musical Musings," said: "When it comes to cornet playing Merle Evans has smoothed out all the wrinkles. He begins where others leave off. Speaking of Merle's playing gives us a chance to speak of his band on the Hill Minstrel Show. Merle has chosen his players with skill. This fellow Kingsley is the king of sliphorn artists and Bennett is the stuff on drums. Merle hasn't a weak point in his whole organization."

Minstrel show musicians were known for their ability to play long, high, and loud on their instruments, and Merle could play the high ones on the cornet longer and louder than any one with out seeming effort. Constantly he played around Eb and F above the staff and took the trio of the march *Barnum & Bailey's Favorite*, a full octave higher than written.

When in the spring of 1919 the Ringlings merged their two big circuses into a single colossal amusement enterprise, to be known henceforth as **RINGLING BROS. AND BARNUM & BAILEY CIRCUS; "THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH,"** they selected as bosses, executives and artists the best talent from the two shows. With Karl L. King leaving the circus world as was J. J. Richards of the Ringling Bros. Circus, the Ringlings were determined to engage a bandmaster worthy of their new enterprise. Charles Ringling had learned of Merle Evans and had heard him play with the Gus Hill Minstrels. Mr. Ringling was himself a musician of no mean ability and he recognized in Merle Evans a young man of obvious physical stamina, legitimate ambition and exceptional musical attainments.

"Mister Charles," as he was called by his associates approached Mr. Evans with an offer to direct the new Ringling-Barnum Circus band. Merle stared at Charles Ringling, unable at first to utter a word. There flashed before him the memory of what Clevel Pullen had hold him only six short seasons earlier. Was this actually prophecy fulfilled? Merle was just past twenty-six years of age. He thought of the world's great arenic artists who would grace the pro-

gram of this new super circus. He knew how mercurial these could be in their demands upon the band. For a brief moment there loomed before Merle the fact that his music library was a limited one. Merle Evans was plain scared, — afraid to either accept or reject this fabulous offer to front the band of the world's newest and biggest circus. He feared he might fail, yet here was the opportunity of a lifetime, — to travel with "The Greatest Show on Earth" and play in all the leading cities of his coun-

From that season on, Mr. Charles came to Merle about midsummer each year with a new contract and always there was an increase in pay. Shortly before he died, Charles Ringling had promised Merle Evans a forty piece band with soloists for the center ring concerts, but that was one dream of theirs that was not fulfilled.

At the close of the 1955 season Merle resigned as the director of the Ringling-Barnum Circus. For thirty-seven consecutive years Merle had directed



try. He somehow found the courage to say "Yes" to Mr. Ringling.

From Fred Bradna, the circus' colorful equestrian director, Merle obtained the roster of performers that were to appear in that season's program and went to work. He scurried around and filled in the gaps in his library and proceeded to lay out the music that in his opinion would best build each act to its full potential.

When Merle Evans stood before his band in Madison Square Garden the evenings of March 29, 1919 and heard the shrill whistle of the equestrian director summon him to duty he was more nervous than any pitcher who ever stepped to the rubber in his first Big League game, of that he is sure. The slender, youthful, talented cornet player struggled valiently through his first performance and half heard Mr. Charles compliment him on a job well done. When later that summer Mr. Ringling asked for a conference with Merle he concluded the jig was up, — he had failed to make the grade after all. After a few commonplaces between them, Charles Ringling asked Merle Evans to sign for next season. Unexpectedly finding the courage to so do, Merle asserted that he would want some increase in salary for both his men and himself and was happily surprised when he was tendered more than he had requested.

the great band on the "Greatest Show On Earth" under the big top, never missing or being tardy for a single performance, — a record that should surely inspire young musicians everywhere. No musician ever stayed with one circus so long. In those thirty-seven years Merle directed the band on 7,161 circus dates and cued 14,130 performances. He rode the Ringling-Barnum show trains a total of 535,045 miles in that time. These records do not include the portion of the 1938 season after the Big One closed in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and Merle went to the Al. G. Barnes, Sells Floto Circus along with other Ringling-Barnum attractions. Nor do they include the Cuban engagements in which Merle directed the band of the combined show.

After Merle resigned as the band director of the "Greatest Show On Earth" there was much criticism about the non circus music used on the show. Alex Muphree wrote in the *Denver Post* on August 31, 1958 as follows:

"Gone with the big top. Modern Circus Lacks Traditional Music.

"It may be purest nostalgia, the memory of something as being twice as big and a thousand times better than it every actually was, the only thing I really miss from Sunday's version of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus in the Coliseum instead of the Big Top is the circusy music.



"Once upon a time when Merle Evans, cornet in hand, stood in front of his big band and responded to the cues of the ringmaster's imperious whistle there was real wonder and true excitement. Now an electronic pipe organ and a smaller band of earnest hard working local musicians no matter how manfully they try — just can't measure up. And one stops to shed a tear, too, for the steam calliope with its unearthly, off key shriekings, excruciating, of course, but in a most satisfying way — the scratching and itchy spot that is hard to get at . . .

"But one of the main reasons for missing Merle Evans and his Big Show band is the intrinsic sound. The band was heavy with windjammers-cornet players who never used mutes, took the lead and rode on out of which Evans was the king and the percussion with the snare drum rolls used to build up suspense to its ultimate in tensile strength."

Irvin Kirby wrote in the *Billboard* on April 13, 1959 as follows:

"... The overture follows, as Izzy Cervone leads the 25 piece band thru John Ringling North's "Children of All Ages" theme song with announcer-vocalist George Michel spotlighted . . . As for circus music, it is a collection of popular songs to the exclusion of familiar big top galops and other choices. One concession to theatrical sanity this year is the elimination of string instruments from the band. North, however, is continuing on his anti-circus music tack, and nothing written here or elsewhere is going to prompt any changes in 1959 . . ."

Merle Evans returned to the Ringling-Barnum Circus again in 1961 and he continued to direct the band on the "Greatest Show on Earth" for another nine years until he resigned on December 12, 1969. For forty-six years Merle directed the band on the Big One.

On Merle's return to the Ringling-Barnum Circus the following story appeared in the 1961 program:

"Toscani Of The Big Top.

"In musical circles the world over and in the minds of millions of American circus goers, the name of Merle Evans means circus music, the rousing marches and lilting melodies of the Big Top.

"For 36 consecutive years — from 1919 through 1955 — Mr. Evans as leader of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey band played a total of 14,410 performances without missing a single one. His record is a musical first if there ever was one.

"Absent from the bandstand of the Greatest Show on Earth for the past 5 years, Mr. Evans returns for this 1961 season to the great gratification of the circus personnel as well as to all others who appreciate real circus music . . ."

In the April 8, 1961 issue of the *Boston Traveler*, it is said:

"New York (AP)—Merle Evans, who plays cornet with one hand while eating popcorn with the other, is back and the circus sounds more like a circus again."

The *Charlotte Observer* commented on March 2, 1961:

"Evans Sparkling Music Rekindles Circus Magis.

"Rollicking music directed by veteran band leader Merle Evans lifted the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus performance Wednesday night into gaiety it hasn't had since the Big Top came down and the show moved indoors.

"Evans is back after four (Five) years' absence.

"Just as fluffy pink costumes suit dancing circus girls, so Evans' music gives the show a fluffy pink atmosphere."

Mr. Evans has always had a sixth sense when it comes to cueing a circus performance. Not alone has he excelled all other circus bandmasters in the speed with which he pick up the multitude of ever changing cues but he somehow developed an "instinct" for divining what acts would appear next in a program which was suddenly changed because of the threat of a storm or some other emergency.

Merle's geniality is akin to his musicianship, and he is a gifted conversationalist, the rapidity of his speech reminding one of his tempo when playing the one-to-the-bar galops in a circus performance. He has a wealth of experience in carnival, showboat, minstrel and circus life with which to regale his listeners. He is a prolific writer of letters, corresponding with a truly large number of musicians and other friends around the country. At the time of his retirement he had the most extensive library of circus music in this country. He has had several of his own compositions published, and among these are his marches *Fredella*, *Symphonia Red Wagons*, *Grand Entry*, *Sarasota*, *C. F. A.*, and *Circus Band Wagon* and his galop *Fire Jump*.

Mr. Evans has played a goodly number of engagements for the Orrin Davenport Shrine Circus, the Olympia Circus in London, England and has been a guest conductor for many high school and municipal band concerts in many sections of this country. He has directed bands for a large number of records for Victor, Columbia, Decca, Everest, Silver Crest, Golden Crest, London and Century.

An endless number of awards, tributes and honors have been made or conferred upon Merle.

Merle Evans is the only musician that has directed bands in the Ringling-Barnum Circus parades; that has directed bands in the center ring concerts on that show and the only circus band director that has played for, cued and

been associated with all the super stars and all the greatest artists and acts that have appeared with the Ringling-Barnum Circus and he and Jimmy Ille are the only two circus band directors that have directed circus bands on the greatest of all circuses.



Henry Kyes, who is currently directing the band of the Polack Bros. Circus, has played more years in circus bands than any living man. Author's Collection.

Another circus musician with an enviable record is Henry Kyes, who was born in Washington, Illinois, one of a family of eleven children. As a youngster he played with the village band and the church orchestra. Henry's father was an attorney and a justice of the peace and he was eager that his son should follow in his footsteps. The father tried to persuade the boy that as a musician he would be headed down a blind alley, a fact he would discover too late to establish himself in the legal profession. Again the old story held true; the son was determined to become a musician and to convince his father of his mistaken judgment young Henry in 1909 in Pekin, Illinois, joined out with the Parker Amusement Company, a carnival. All went well until this outfit arrived in Salem, Oregon where it went broke. Far from quite undaunted, the lad from Washington, Illinois journeyed to Pasadena, California to play cornet with the Howe's Great London Shows. This was the start of what was to become one of the longest circus records of any musician in history.

The band on the Howe's Great London Shows was an excellent one under the leadership of C. H. Tinney, a competent director but a hard taskmaster.



Tinney's musicians had to "cut" it to his satisfaction or leave!

Kyes played with a number of theater orchestras and army bands before he accepted the role of a circus troupier only. In recent years he sometimes remarks that he has never played with an amateur band since he left home and adds, "But some of them sounded like a bunch of amateurs, I'll grant."

In the spring of 1921 Kyes became a member of the Ringling-Barnum band under the baton of Merle Evans where he played continuously through the 1937 season. In 1938 he became director of the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus Band but returned to the Ringling Show in 1939 to remain through the first year of 1944. Since he has directed bands on the Cole Bros.; Sparks and Polack Bros. Circuses and Ringling-Barnum engagements in Cuba. He was director of the Ringling's Circus Spangles the summer it played Madison Square Garden.

Those who have had the pleasure of knowing Henry Kyes are agreed that he is a very friendly individual with a genial personality and a fund of good circus yarns. He is a clever cartoonist and each year delights his friends with Christmas greeting cards which he himself has sketched. He enjoys cooking, and his more intimate friends can attest to his being a versatile chef.

Henry in his many years of trouping savored the fun and the frustrations of circus life. He has been involved in no less than five circus train wrecks and six blow-downs. He will never forget a blow-down when he was with the Sanger Circus in 1913. It occurred on the Gettysburg battlefield. Buried under tons of heavy, wet canvas Kyes finally succeeded in cutting a hole in this only to find escape most effectively blocked by a tangle of barbed wire fencing. Peals of thunder, incessant flashes of lightning, and rain descending down in torrents for a time convinced Henry that Robert E. Lee was again canonading the Union forces with himself stranded between the battle lines of the North and the South.

In speaking of cueing a circus performance, Kyes commented, "Cueing is like making a suit of clothes. You trim a little off here and add a little there to get the proper fit. You try to interpret every movement of the performers, the animals, and all that goes to make a circus performance. What makes a good band director is the ability to select music to fit each segment of the performance and to pick up the fast and never-ending cues, — and there are generally some 200 of these." Then Henry added, "Merle Evans is an artist at cueing a performance and does not need an equestrian director. At the finish of an act he is always 'Johnny-on-the-spot' with the right chord, timed to the one-thousandth of a second, literally." This is high praise, indeed, coming from one

who is himself a master of the art.

Very few circus directors or musicians have hailed from the extreme northeast section of the United States, but Victor H. ("Vic") Robbins is an exception, coming from the State of Maine. Unlike so many musicians he came into the circus world with a musical training. Vic was born at Hogdon, Maine on January 30, 1897. His father was both a newspaper man and a musician. He played trombone with the Barnum & Bailey Band during the 1892 season and appeared with Patrick Gilmore, who had the first of the big business concert bands in this country. Vic's brother, "Bill," was the director of the Music Department of the Porterville (California) Union High School and College for more than twenty years.

Victor's father started his son Vic on a musical career at the age of ten, giving him instruction on an upright alto horn. Elmer Towne, a friend of the Robbins family and a former director of bands in Boston, prevailed upon Vic to study the cornet. Towne was not wholly disinterested in this for he was in need of a cornetist for the Madison and Lake-wood (Maine) Band. He gave young Robbins cornet lessons, so both profited. Later Vic followed the example of many circus cornetists and studied under the generous and inspiring William Paris Chambers, and still later received a scholarship in music at the Manlius Military School in Manlius, New York from which he graduated. Desiring further education he enrolled in the University of Maine and became a member

Victor Robbins, known for his long term as leader on the Sells-Floto Circus, had full papers as a merchant seaman and served during World War II. Author's Collection.



of the Bangor Band and Orchestra under the direction of Adelbert W. Sprague, who later became the president of the Northeastern Conservatory of Music as well as the director of the Music department of the University of Maine.

Robbins served a stretch in the Navy during the First World War and following his discharge packed away his cornet and his music and became an engineer in the Merchant Marine. He held a valid set of papers for any waters in the world. Music called, however, and Vic traveled the chautauqua circuits and played with various dance bands and in the orchestra pits of theaters. In 1922, quite by chance, he met Al. Massey in Boston. Massey was a well known circus band director who at the time was recruiting musicians for the John Robinson Show. He signed a contract with Vic Robbins to play cornet. The following season Massey became the bandmaster on the Sells-Floto Circus and took his entire band with him. During the season he confided to Robbins that he, Massey, was going to leave the Show and urged Vic to apply for the directorship.

The Sells-Floto Show at that time was one of the major circuses in this country, and in 1924 Mr. Robbins became its band director, beginning what was to become a long career as director of circus bands. When Vic first signed with Sells-Floto, his brother Bill was employed by the First National Bank in Boston. He was persuaded to play French horn in Vic's band and violin in the aftershow concert.

The Sells-Floto Show was among those acquired by John Ringling when he bought out the American Circus Corporation on the eve of the Great Depression. By 1932 millions of Americans were unable to buy bread and to them circus tickets were in much the same category as sables and yachts, so at the end of that season Mr. Ringling took this show off the road.

Loathe to leave the tanbark trail, Vic Robbins accepted a position as cornetist with Kay Bros., one of the early truck circuses, and played in their band during the 1933 and 1934 seasons.

Zack Terrell had been manager of the Sells-Floto Circus in 1932 and when he and Jess Adkins organized the Cole Bros. Show in the spring of 1935 Vic Robbins was installed as the band director. He continued in that capacity through the 1942 season when he returned to the Merchant Marine to serve his country until the end of World War II. On receiving his discharge in 1945 he became director of the band on the Clyde Beatty Circus. The following year he was band master on the Sparks Circus. He returned to the Beatty Show in 1947 and remained there until 1957.

Two former Ringling-Barnum executives, Frank McCloskey and Walter Kernan purchased the Beatty Circus in





that year and decided to transport it on trucks. Vic Robbins had enjoyed the comforts afforded by the bandmen's car on circus trains during all but two years (those he spent with Kay Bros.) of his trouping. He disliked the sleeping accommodations of truck shows so decided the time had come for him to forsake the tanbark trail. He returned to Porterville, California, and retired. After leaving the circus world his only musical endeavors were with an Elks Band. He cherishes many fond memories of his circus days and has no regrets that his musical career was spent in the world of sawdust and spangles. He died in Porterville, California, on October 28, 1970.

Back in the year when the American circus was playing a dominant role on America's amusement stage William N. Merrick of Zanesville, Ohio made his debut in this branch of the entertainment world. He played an Eb cornet with the Van Amburgh overland show in 1870, two years before William C. Coup of Delavan, Wisconsin first put a circus on rails. John Philip Sousa often remarked that he would like to find for his famous band two Eb cornetists of the caliber of his good friend William N. Merrick.

Mr. Merrick was one of the first band leaders to employ a fully instrumented band under canvas and he introduced many novel features into his repertoire. In his earlier days he wrote virtually all the music he used in the circus programs, and it was truly original in conception and execution. For the grand entry on the Adam Forepaugh Circus he wrote the march *Equestrienne*. Nor was Merrick alone a good director for the performance proper but a capable conductor for the center ring concerts that in those days preceded the appearance of the arenic stars. His life was devoted to directing bands on the Forepaugh, Sells Bros., Great Wallace, Forepaugh-Sells, and the Carl Hagenbeck Circuses. His son A. N. Merrick, played bass in a number of these bands.

In the circus world it became an accepted fact that if one had played with a Gentry Bros. band under the baton of Harry Crigler one had received the

C. L. Brown is shown with his Sells-Floto band in 1918. In 1970 he wrote the "Beatty Cole Triumphant" march. Author's Collection.

equivalent of a good college course in band music. Crigler was born on a farm Connorsville, Indiana, on August 20, 1867 and at the age of five moved with his family to Lebanon in that State. Here at the age of twelve he began the study of music. His first professional experience came with the Diefenbach Circus. Following that he played bass, baritone, trombone and cornet with a number of circus bands. When he became the director of the band on the Terrell Bros. Circus in Paducah, Kentucky in 1890 he discarded all but the cornet, finding that that instrument best lent itself to the role of bandmaster.

Crigler played with the Gentry Bros. Circus in 1897 and thereafter was a member of band on Hugo Bros., Barnum & Bailey, and the Adam Forepaugh circuses. He, too, savored of the experiences afforded by showboats and minstrel bands, playing for a time with the Eugene Robinson Floating Palace and with Hi Henry's Minstrels. In 1905 Gentry Bros. engaged him to direct their band, and he continued in that capacity through the 1917 season. Crigler had no difficulty in attracting experienced musicians to his bands for he was recognized as an outstanding director, able to get from his men their ultimate in talent and effort.

A circus musician who carved a splendid career for himself was H. A. Vandercook. He became nationally known as an instructor on the cornet and other brass instruments and was the founder of the Vandercook School of Music in Chicago, but his road to success was far from easy. Born in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1865 he lived for a time in Grand Rapids and then went to Vandalia, Illinois, lured by the offer of a position in the band of the new circus, the J. H. La Pearl Show.

When Vandercook walked onto the lot of this infant circus his heart sank. There was little in its equipment to suggest that it was, indeed, a circus. It

required but five rigs to transport it from town to town. Two gilly wagons sufficed to carry the equipment and the workingmen. The performers rode in a four-seater back. The La Pearl family, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. J. H. their children, Harry, Roy and Ruby, and Mrs. La Pearl's sister, Rosa Carman, used a pony carriage. A lone bandwagon, far from pretensions, transported the La Pearl Marine Band, of which one member was H. A. Vandercook.

This little show played to capacity business during its opening engagement of two days in Vandalia, thanks to the loyal support given it by the home town folks. Leaving Vandalia they encountered extremely bad weather and with but \$2.25 in the treasury returned home. Again the citizens of Vandalia responded to splendidly that the circus ventured forth once more. Weather improved, amusement-hungry people paid to watch its performance and the season proved a success.

When the La Pearl Circus arrived in Litchfield, Illinois Mr. Vandercook was made director of the band, continuing as such through the 1897 season, its last on the road. Difficult as it is to believe today this little circus carried a twenty-five piece band that last year and its musicians were competent. No doubt this band under Vandercook's able direction was one of the Show's chief attractions, for in those days people living outside the metropolitan centers had little opportunity to hear other than church music except as circuses brought their bands into village and town. It was while trouping with this circus that

Charles Schlarbaum, leader of the Beatty Cole band, has the largest library of circus music of any current leader. Pfening Photo.





Vandercook wrote his great street march, **Bombardment**. Among his other compositions we find **Olevine**, **Grand Entree**, **La Pearl** and **Ashtonian**.

Vandercook trouped with at least one other circus, Rich's and with such minstrel shows as Hi Henry, Mason and Morgan, and Col. Heywood's Mastodon. He became an excellent arranger of music and one of the country's foremost instructors. Those who knew him spoke of him as a gentleman in the finest sense of the word.

The three most widely known of the Wild West shows that took to the road in this country were Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill, and Miller Bros. 101 Ranch. William F. Sweeney was the band director on the Buffalo Bill Show for at least twenty-one years' Nicola Olivieri was for a number of years the bandmaster on the Pawnee Bill Wild West Show, and Donato C. La Blanca fronted the band on the 101 Ranch. These three men used either Italian or Mexican musicians almost exclusively.

It should now be apparent that the Central States of our nation have furnished to circuses most of their outstanding bandmasters. A horde of talented circus bandsmen likewise came from this area. A little town in Iowa with the intriguing name of What Cheer sent forth several very competent musicians to troupe with the various circuses that crosscrossed our country during the latter decades of the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth centuries. Among them were the Dalzel brothers whose chief interest to this narrative is the fact that they gave a fellow What Cheerer, C. L. Brown, his early musical training.

It was young Brown's good fortune that still another circus musician, the famous bandmaster, Al. Sweet, took an interest in the lad from Iowa. Sweet recognized Brown's latent talents and advised the youth that if he desired to make music his career he would do well to seek competent instruction and suggested he go to Chicago for such. This Brown did.

Yet again the circus played a decisive role in shaping C. L. Brown's life. He chanced to be in Salt Lake City in 1914 when Gentry Bros. Dog and Pony Show played that beautiful city. Its band was an irresistible magnet for the young musician and he joined out as a cornet player. It must have come as a happy surprise to him when only three weeks later he was appointed director of this unit, for the Gentry Bros. Circus bands had established the reputation of being among this country's best. The entire equipment and personnel of this well known and much liked circus was carried on only two railway cars, but its band numbered no less than twelve musicians.

A year later when Hugo Bros. fifteen car circus took to the road from



P. G. Lowery was the greatest of all side show bandleaders. He is shown here with his band on the Norris & Rowe Circus. Pfening Collection.

Cedar Rapids, Iowa C. L. Brown directed its fifteen piece band of talented musicians. He was told that this Show withheld until the seasons end the first two weeks salary, — a custom long prevalent in the circus world. Seasons' end found the Show's owners with good forgetters and Mr. Brown with a years valuable experience.

C. L. Brown went on to direct bands on the Sparks Circus and the famous Sells-Floto Show which so bitterly contested territory with the Ringlings. While trouping with the Sells-Floto Brown organized a group of five clowns and a blackface comedian whose capers caught the fancy of audiences. He decided to book this troupe on vaudeville circuits as the Original Brown Saxophone Six. For twelve years it toured theaters and fairs and everywhere met with popular acclaim.

Sawdust continued to course through Brown's veins, however, and when in 1949 he received a telegram asking him to front the band on the Cole Bros. Circus he could no longer resist the lure of the tanbark world. The life of a circus troupier was more strenuous than Mr. Brown thought his advancing years should be asked to accept, however, and he retired at the end of the season to teach, travel, play with dance bands and talk about the years when he was a part of the great American circus. He has written a number of marches and galops but has published none of them. His last march was written in 1970 called *The Beatty Cole Triumphant March* which he dedicated to Charles Schlarbaum and that was played for the first time on the Beatty Cole Circus South Bend, Indiana, under the direction of C. L. Brown. He writes that today there is nothing he enjoys more than to

meet up with former troupers and "cut jack pots about the 'good old days.'"

Every phase of the circus has undergone momentous changes in recent years and in no aspect has this been more apparent than in the band. The truck shows cannot afford the same facilities for musicians that the big railroad circuses did. At the present day we have only two circus bands that play circus music and properly cue the performances. These are the Ramon Escorcis band on King Bros. and the Charles Schlarbaum band on the Clyde Beatty Cole Bros. Circus. Unless musicians have had several years of experience in playing with circus bands they are not competent to direct circus bands.

Neither does the big July 4th circus parade in Milwaukee every year have circus bands that play circus band wagon music in the tempo it should be played. There are no circus band directors to direct them.

The side show band, like the circus concert band on circuses, is now only a memory. Without any question of a doubt the greatest side show band director of all time was P. G. Lowery, an excellent cornet player who could sting the high ones long and loud as well play all the best of the cornet solos when he had his own minstrel show on the road. He directed bands on such leading circuses as Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows; Ringling Barnum Robbin Bros., and Forepaugh Sells Bros. He was also a composer and his best known composition being *The Prince of Decorah Galop*. Mr. Lowry was a kindly, considerate person and gentleman in every sense of the word and a very interesting conversationist. You can listen to that great circus March of Fred Jewell, High and Mighty that he dedicated to P. G. Lowery. When you play that album of four circus band records that Merle Evans recorded in Boston. It is a very hard march and up in the air all the time.



# The Frontier and The Circus

By FRED D. PFENING III

## INTRODUCTION

I feel I owe a word of explanation to the historical fraternity concerning the origins and intent of this essay, which combines my interest in the circus and American history in general. For a number of years I have felt we have been studying the circus from a too-narrow perspective. Although we have exhausted many topics such as many of the better known parade wagons, and the more important managers and performers. I have long felt that the circus as an institution has been a neglected area of study. In other words, we have not formulated a general theory concerning the paramount question of what caused the rapid growth of the circus, and its subsequent decline, in a period centering around the year 1900. Perhaps if a theory could be worked out, I conjectured, it might shed light on old subjects, and open up many new vistas of study.

It was not until I became a student in Dr. Richard W. Smith's lectures on the American frontier in the Spring of 1970, that I became at least marginally aware of the effect of a growing frontier on all aspects of the American character — including the circus. I prepared a slightly different form of this essay for his course, and would have presented it to the 1970 CHS convention in Baraboo, had not my left lung taken that inopportune occasion to go on the blink. In many respects it is fortunate that I did not have the opportunity to read this paper at that time because in the interim I have found some new material (more noticeably the 1895 Bailey article), and modified some conjectures.

Two other points need to be made in the way of an introduction. The first is simply that this paper in no way pretends to be a definitive statement on the character of the circus. Right now Stuart Thayer, a critic of this theory, is working on this problem from a different perspective. It is hoped, however, that this essay will be suggestive enough for other historians to follow Thayer's lead.

The second point to emphasize is that I am not the first writer to speculate on the rise and fall of the tented circus. Although they worked from an incorrect assumption that Ringling fortunes characterized industry fortunes, almost every general history of the circus, from May to Fox and Parkinson, has remarked on the decline of the big-time railroad circus. Marcello Truzzi, a

sociologist, was the first writer to concern himself with this question who did not approach it from the traditionalist perspective. Readers are encouraged to read his essay, mentioned in a footnote.

One last note. Richard E. Conover and I discussed the "frontier thesis" on a few occasions, and he was in basic agreement with it. His untimely death last February prevented his reading of the manuscript. I greatly regret that he is not alive to analyze this essay in more depth, and I can only hope it can vindicate the master's agreement with this radical approach to an old topic.

"The business of history is to arouse an intelligent discontent, a fruitful radicalism."

—Carl Becker in *The Dial*

The name of Frederick Jackson Turner is rarely, if ever, linked to the circus, yet his ideas may have a profound influence on circus historiography. In 1893, Turner, then a young history professor at the University of Wisconsin, presented a paper to the American Historical Association entitled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" in which he gauged the effect of an ever-changing frontier on the history of this country. He felt this concept of an ever-moving frontier was paramount in explaining American economic and political development, and that its closing would bring about a significant change in the course of traditional American institutions. He concluded his monumental essay by writing: "The frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history." In this paper I have attempted to measure the influence of the frontier on both the rise and fall of the circus, and have concluded, like Turner, that the closing of the frontier ended an era in circus history — the golden age.<sup>1</sup>

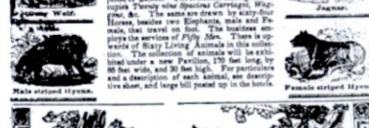
It is, then, the premise of this paper that the primary reason for the decline of the circus in American was not the rise of organized labor, higher corporate taxes, or the advent of television and other diversions, but the fact that between 1900 and 1910 the circus' frontier ended and with it died an era usually called the golden age, and began its decline.<sup>2</sup> That is, by 1910 the circus had no new territory on this continent in which to expand because of the total depletion of new frontiers. There were no longer enough fresh areas that had not seen a circus in a sufficient number of years to make a show's journey to the frontier profitable, or an area where competition was minimal enough to



W ALBANY, (2 1/2 days only) on the corner of Hudson and Hollenback-sts., in view of the T. & C. on TUESDAY and WEDNESDAY, 25th and 26th days of April, and THURSDAY, the 27th day of May. Hours of exhibition on Thursday, 10th April, from 10 A. M. to 1 P. M. and from 7 to 9 P. M. On Wednesday, 26th April, from 10 A. M. to 1 P. M., from 2 to 5 P. M., and from 7 to 9 P. M. And on Thursday, May 1st, from 10 A. M. to 1 P. M., and from 2 to 5 P. M. and from 7 to 9 P. M.



TICKETS OF ADMISSION 25 CENTS, CHILDREN UNDER 10 YEARS OF AGE HALF-PRICE.





make such a venture at least worthwhile.

This frontier thesis has manifest itself on another level during the last few decades in that the urban frontiers of cities, the empty lots and city parks, are rapidly diminishing. This open area, although in urban centers, is nevertheless a frontier in the sense that it is an open area, a frontier that is quickly closing and heralding more bad news for an institution that must eventually alter traditional patterns if it is to survive.<sup>3</sup>

Westward expansion has been a part of American circus history since John Bill Ricketts first took his small troupe into the wilds of Maine and Canada in 1797.<sup>4</sup> Although the performers could not cope with the wilderness of the area which led to the failure of the expedition, it was the first time a showman broke out of the Boston-Philadelphia-New York triangle.

Circus and menagerie men soon became convinced that they could make money by exploiting new areas, and between 1798 and 1810 circuses exhibited in such new areas as Charleston, South Carolina; Albany, New York; and Worcester, Massachusetts.<sup>5</sup> Other men had taken Ricketts' cue, and decided the economic returns would compensate for the then arduous journey to these early frontiers.

After 1810 the circus and menagerie were well established along the Atlantic coast from Canada to South Carolina, and westward to Buffalo and Pittsburgh. In fact, one of the most historic events in circus history took place in Alfred, Maine, on 28 July 1816, when the elephant Old Bet, the second such animal in this country, was shot by a local farmer who didn't care for New York showman taking money out of the territory.<sup>6</sup>

In 1815 the old Northwest Territory was reached when a small circus moved by boat to Chillicothe, Ohio, at that time the state capital. In 1819 the people of Cincinnati saw their first elephant, and in 1830 their first circus.<sup>7</sup>

By 1835 circuses had become as common in Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana as they had been in the East twenty years earlier. Due to circumstances outside the scope of this paper, Somers, New York, became the circus center of America from about 1820 to 1855, and its showmen owned nearly all the circuses and menageries in America at that time. A typical route for the 1830's began in late March in some eastern city such as New York, Baltimore; played New England until about the end of May; and then headed west, either to Canada or Ohio. Around 1 August the average show started its trip back to winter-quarters in Somers by making a southern swing, sometimes going as far south as Northern Florida.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, records of circuses in the ante-

bellum South are very incomplete, but enough research has been done to show that a small circus toured Georgia in 1828, and that the huge Grand Menagerie owned by the Somers syndicate reached Florida in January of 1832.<sup>9</sup>

By 1840 the circus and menagerie had penetrated almost every state East of the Mississippi River. The population in nearly all areas of the Eastern and Midwestern United States was large enough to make it worthwhile for a showman to take his company near the swamps of Florida or the fields and forests of Indiana. The show traveling in these frontier areas was assured that it would run into little, or more likely no, competition, quite a difference from Eastern areas where opposition was keen.

Circuses can play only areas which are populated enough to make their visit profitable; therefore, St. Louis and New Orleans were unique cities in the West that could support a circus. Hence, it is not surprising that as in 1823 a circus performed in St. Louis.<sup>10</sup> The few Americans that lived between the Mississippi River and California never saw a circus during this period. However, circus owners were quick to realize that the miners in California thought they had money to spend, and the circus in that state developed rapidly in the late 1840's, and early 1850's.

Joseph Andrew Rowe was the first man to exploit the "49'ers." Traveling by ship from New York through the straits of Magellan to San Francisco, his circus first played that city on 29 October 1849.<sup>11</sup> Others followed, and by 1860 much of the great Northwest saw a circus. In 1860 the Dan Rice Circus (without the famous jester) ventured into British Columbia, the first circus to do so.<sup>12</sup>

By 1850 the circus and the fast-dying menagerie had traveled in every state east of the ninety-eight meridian, and the Pacific Coast, and in 1843 another frontier was opened when the United Kingdom, and the old family circuses of England became fair game for enterprising American showmen.

This new frontier was opened by Lewis B. Lent, a Somers showman, when he took his Sands and Lent Circus to England. When this show pitched its tents in England, it was the first time the English ever saw a circus perform in a tent, all previous English shows having played in arenas.<sup>13</sup>

The invasion continued. In 1844 the Van Amburgh Menagerie, also owned by Lent, made the trip and stayed two years. The show's top feature, Isaac A. Van Amburgh, stunned London by actually going into a cage of lions.<sup>14</sup>

When the Civil War began, circus profits were cut because the territory in which circuses could travel was restricted, the frontier temporarily closed. No circus played in the Confederate states during the four years of hostili-

## THE GRAND CARAVAN.

1846



**TRIUMPHAL Entrance and Exhibition**  
in this city of the vast and magnificent  
VAN AMBURGH COLLECTION OF  
**TRAINED ANIMALS!**  
*Preceded by the new and Colossal Roman  
Chariot!*

Constructed after the model of the Ancient Chariots  
of the Roman Conquerors, in the most costly  
gorgeous style of workmanship, being 20  
feet in length by 17 feet in height,

**Drawn by eight imported Flemish horses,**  
of prodigious size and weight—and containing  
*Shelton's Famous American Brass Band!*

### THE PROCESSION

Consisting of 100 Horses and 30 Carriages, will enter this city on

**Monday, July 27, at 11 o'clock!**

At the westerly end of Congress street, pass down  
Congress to Centre street—down Centre to Fore  
street, down Fore to India street, up India  
to Middle St.—up Middle to City Hall;  
then through Congress St. to the place  
of Exhibition, southerly side of the  
Observatory, on Munjoy.

When this unprecedented display of Wild Beasts,  
and the performances of Mr. Van Amburgh, for the  
first time in this city since his arrival from Europe,  
after an absence of seven years, will be exhibited

**For Three days only,**

**27th, 28th, and 29th of July.**

The following is a list of the Animals contained in  
this Exhibition.

#### African Lion and Lioness.

Four Young Asiatic Lions—Cape Lioness and Lion  
*The Asiatic Elephant.*

Young Elephant two years old—Beautiful specimens  
of the Peruvian Llama.

Arabian Camel—two Calavard Leopards.

Two African Leopards—two Hunting Leopards.

Peonah Bear, and two Missouri Bears.

Black Swan—a Pelican.

#### THE ROYAL BENGAL TIGER.

The Black Tiger.

White Polar Bears—Doe and her Young.

Pair of Kangaroos—Jaguar, from South America  
Gnu, or Horned Horse.

Three specimens of American Deer—Queen's Stag,  
presented to Mr. Van Amburgh by Queen Victoria.  
The Alpaca—The Zebra.

Striped Hyenas, Spotted Hyenas—two White Swans.  
Gold and Silver Pheasants.

A large African Baboon and specimens of the Monkey  
and Ape Tribe.

It is proper to acquaint the public that the  
above named animals have never before been exhib-  
ited in America, having been but recently selected  
from the great National Museum of the Old World,  
the Zoological Society of London, and the Jardins  
des Plantes of Paris.

On Monday the exhibition will open from 2 to 4 and  
7 to 9 Evening, and on Tuesday and Wednesday there  
will be Morning performances from 10 to 12 A. M.  
2 to 4 and 7 to 9 P. M.

Admission 25cts children under 10 half price.

July 9



ties.<sup>15</sup> Showmen felt the influence of this temporary closing of the frontier. On 21 June 1863, Hyatt Frost, then owner of the Van Amburgh Menagerie, wrote a friend: "I am fully of the opinion that our fall business is going to be rather slim as there is (sic) so many companies now traveling and so small a country that we have to use."<sup>16</sup>

Realizing that fresh money awaited them in the Midwest and Plains states, circus owners began to move their winter-quarters into the area. For example in 1848 the winterquarters of the second unit of the Raymond and Waring Menagerie, the largest such exhibition in the country, moved from Somers to Zanesville, Ohio.<sup>17</sup> This show played a western route along the Great Lakes to Milwaukee, and returned to Zanesville by a long sweep through Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana.

In 1847, the brothers Mabie, Edmund and Jereimah, left Somers and settled their show in Delevan, Wisconsin.<sup>18</sup> Delevan became the major circus city in America for almost fifty years. A total of twenty-seven circuses were based in that city until its decline as a circus center in the 1890's.<sup>19</sup>

The railroad soon revolutionized the circus. By rail shows could play new areas, make longer jumps, enjoy safer conditions, and perhaps most importantly, reach new frontiers in the West.

Experimentation with railroads began in 1853 when the Den Stone Circus made a few unsuccessful jumps by rail. A few other shows also tried traveling by rail in the decade but approximately only 25,000 miles of track existed at this time, almost all of which was located in areas where it was easier for a company to reach by wagon.

However, during the years 1858-1868 railway mileage increased forty-six per cent, and on 10 May 1869, the famous golden spike was driven in Promontory, Utah, where the transcontinental railroad became a reality. On the first passenger train to make the trip was James M. Nixon. His mission was to survey the possibility of taking a circus over the Union Pacific. He found no great complications, and subsequently on 27 May 1869, the Nixon owned Dan Castello Circus hit the rails headed for the rich mining areas of the West.<sup>20</sup>

Starting from Omaha, the show played the Union Pacific line to North Platte, Cheyenne, and then Denver. At Colorado's capital the show left their train, and made what turned into a dangerous march. Denver's *Rocky Mountain News* wrote: "The rain, darkness and excessively muddy roads have delayed the arrival of the circus . . . Mr. Castello, as the weather has turned out, has taken a great risk in venturing so far from the railroad." On 26 July the show reached San Francisco, and the first transcontinental tour by a circus

was completed.<sup>21</sup> The era of the railroad circus had arrived.

The circus not only covered much new territory after 1869, but also the number of shows on the road increased.

1863 **NIXON'S**  
**CREMORNE**  
**CIRCUS.**  
**MME MACARTE'S**  
**EUROPEAN CIRCUS.**  
**First appearance in America.**









































































































































































































































































































































































Number of known circuses and menageries

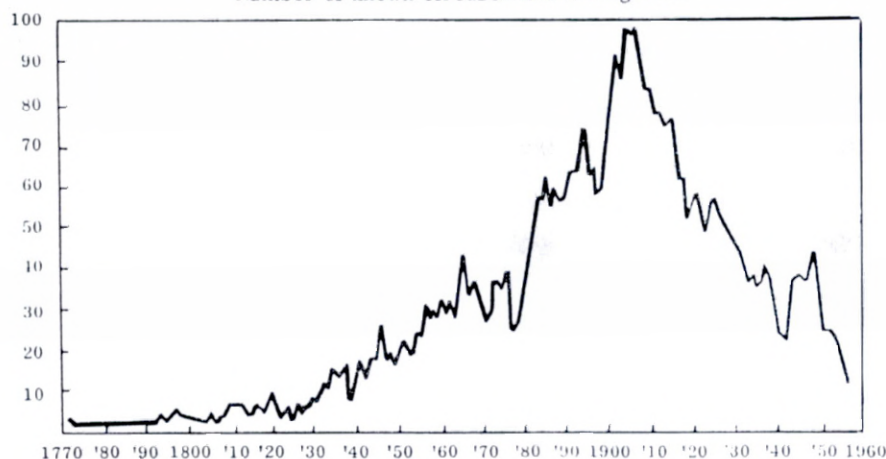


FIGURE 1. THE GROWTH AND DECLINE OF AMERICAN CIRCUSES, 1771-1956

Compiled by Marcello Truzzi from George L. Chindahl, *A History of the Circus in America*, (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1959), pp. 240-272.

that a Bailey owned outfit was in Europe continuously from 1898 to 1906.

The golden age of the circus is usually thought to have begun in 1881 when Barnum and Bailey joined forces, and to have reached its zenith about 1900. That year approximately seventy American circuses toured, headed by the Barnum and Bailey Circus in Europe, and the fast-rising Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows, which played California for the first time. They were followed by the Forepaugh-Sells Circus in the East and South; the Buffalo Bill Wild West in the East, and the John Robinson Show in the Midwest and South. These were all large outfits of forty railroad cars or more.<sup>25</sup>

Every state and territory now saw a circus each year. Although the dozen or so really large shows confined themselves to metropolitan areas from coast to coast; the rural sections of the country saw a two or three car railroad show, or one of the fast-dying wagon circuses. Circuses were wintering in nearly every state in the union with a majority of them inside the borders of Wisconsin and Indiana. The center of gravity of the circus had moved halfway across the continent in a hundred years.

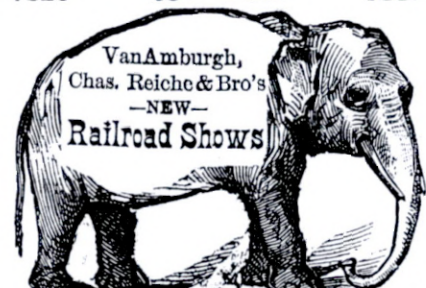
Circuses, are, of course, affected by recessions and depressions, but the institution, not without difficulty, survived those of the nineteenth century, and continued to grow (see Figure 1). After each period of economic decline, there was always a new area into which a circus could travel when money was tight back home. The case of the Arizona is a good example of this ever changing frontier into which a circus can go when business is bad in the East.

The ten years from 1900 to 1909 are critical in analyzing the decline of the

## Largest and Best at Half Price.

Cheap prices and good shows are the motto of the day.—Washington Republic.

1820 65TH SEASON. 1885



AMERICAN AND JAPANESE CIRCUS, MUSEUM, AQUARIUM AND MENAGERIE.

HYATT FROST, MANAGER, - 39TH YEAR.

ADMISSION TWENTY-FIVE CENTS. WILL EXHIBIT ON

## New Fair Grounds, Wednesday, July 29.

The Menagerie is unusually complete, having been collected by Charles Reiche & Brother, of New York and Alfeld, Germany, the largest importers and dealers in wild beasts in the world, the principal feature of which is the RAREST ANIMAL ALIVE

## QUEDAH.

the offspring of a MYSTERIOUS MALAY MOUNTAIN MAMMOTH taken captive by Reiche & Bro's Hunters and safely brought to America.

THE FIRST DISCOVERED SINCE THE DEPT. QUEDAH is a descendant of the prehistoric monsters that were contemporaneous with the Ichthyosaurus and Pterodactyl.

THE CIRCUS IS FIRST-CLASS IN EVERY RESPECT, and includes

MITSURA'S ROYAL DRAGON JAPANESE, besides the Star Artists of the arenas of all nations.

The Price Twenty Five Cents. will permit parents to take the whole family. Everybody will go. Free Street Parade about 10 a. m.

TWO PERFORMANCES AFTERNOON AND NIGHT. Doors open at 1 and 7 p. m. Begins at 2 and 8 p. m.

One Ticket Admits to All.

ADMISSION, - 25 CENTS.

CHAS. H. DAY, Director of Publication.

Will exhibit at Auburn, Tuesday, July 28. Syracuse, Wednesday, July 29. Lyons, Thursday, July 30. Rochester, Friday, July 31.

circus in the context of this frontier thesis. It was in this ten year period that the number of circuses in America diminished by almost one-third, an unprecedented decline.<sup>26</sup> Why?

It is the thesis of this paper that the closing of the circus' frontier, the opening of which had done so much in the growth of the institution, caused its downfall. It was during these critical ten years that a circus could no longer exhibit in a "frontier" area, confident the customers had not seen a circus in a number of years, and certain that they would encounter little or no competition from other shows. In 1896, Charles E. Cory wrote of the appearance of the Great Wallace Circus in Flagstaff, Arizona:

First big show ever here and everybody wild with enthusiasm. One woman had hysterics at sight of the elephants being led to the lot in the morning, and small boys stood around on the corners with their eyes fairly bulging from their heads at sight of so many strange animals never seen before except in picture books.<sup>27</sup>

This statement could never be made after 1905 when almost all the country possessed some type of railroad facilities, which ended the circus' frontier that began in 1798 when John Ricketts' Circus went to Canada. After about 1905 no circus agent could have written a statement like Cory's; too many people had seen a circus; there were no more fresh areas.<sup>28</sup> For the first time the entire country was accessible to circuses.

The decline of the circus can be compared to an over-filled balloon that explodes. The balloon can hold increased quantities of air safely, until it reaches a point at which it explodes. The circus functions within the geography of the United States as air does within a balloon. As long as there was an area that could expand when more circuses appeared, there was no problem; but, when the frontier ended, like the balloon filling to capacity, new circuses ran into much more competition, and old ones no longer found a frontier to exhibit on when new business was needed. During the years 1900-1909, the circus first operated inside a filled balloon, a closed frontier, that could no longer expand; naturally the institution could not either.

The larger circuses reacted quickly. On 1 November 1904, the five brothers Ringling met with James A. Bailey "for the purpose of promoting the mutual interest" of their circuses.<sup>29</sup> They determined the territory where each company could exhibit during the 1905 season. New York City was the exclusive territory of the Barnum and Bailey Circus, while Chicago was given to the Ringling Brothers' World's Greatest Shows. The Bailey organization was given first rights on areas North of the



Ohio River, including the big date in Cincinnati, and East of the Mississippi River.<sup>30</sup> The Ringlings were given preference over all areas West of the Mississippi and South of the Ohio, excepting New Orleans. Each circus could exhibit in the territory of the other, but only after the other show had selected the cities in which it wished to perform. The Ringling Circus was to select its cities on or before 15 December 1904, and the Barnum and Bailey Circus by 1 April 1905.<sup>31</sup>

In this nine point contract the owners also agreed to limit their bill-posting to around 8,000 sheets a day, to stop comparing the size of their circus to the other for publicity reasons, and to abandon the street parade.<sup>32</sup> If either party broke the agreement, a \$100,000 fine was to be paid as penalty. Similar contracts were negotiated by Bailey and the Ringlings until 1907 when the Baraboo brothers bought the Barnum and Bailey Circus from Bailey's estate.<sup>33</sup>

Both these giants evidently realized that they could no longer take their shows into areas without fear of competition from the other. They had to adjust; if they didn't have any control over the closing frontier, at least they did have some control in limiting the competition.

No longer wasn't profitable for a circus to go "West" when business was bad back East. A circus in the 1890's, such as the previously mentioned Great Wallace Circus, could travel west and find business excellent in areas that had never seen a show before, but if that same show went west only ten years later, it would find, instead of virgin circus territory, competition from the numerous circuses stationed west of the Rockies. This list was headed by the Sells-Floto show whose owners, the Denver Post, put it on the road on thirty railroad cars. Other new Western circuses were owned by Norris and Rowe, who operated two shows, and Al G. Barnes (Stonehouse). Both these circuses wintered in California, and rarely went east of the Mississippi.

Thus the closing of the frontier ended an era when circuses could exhibit in "western" areas assured that the citizens there were hungry for entertainment, and where the owners were certain of little, or more likely no, competition. The great boom period of the circus symbolically began when the Dan Castello Circus traveled over the Union Pacific in 1869, and ended about 1905 when the Ringlings and James A. Bailey decided for the first time to voluntarily limit each others territory. The temporary phenomenon that Hyatt Frost recognized in 1863 became permanent after 1900; there were too many circuses, and too little territory.

The decline of the urban frontier, open areas in or near cities that are suitable circus sites, has also affected



the circus. For the last few decades it has become increasingly difficult, almost impossible at times, for a circus to obtain a lot close enough to an urban center to make an exhibition economically worthwhile. What were once empty fields are now shopping centers and housing developments. The circus is being pushed farther and farther away from profitable population centers.

Once again the large shows have adjusted to this change. Since 1957 the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus has played in baseball parks, and arenas, alleviating the problem of finding a lot near a city. The \$800,000 profit the organization made in 1969 is tribute to the move.<sup>34</sup> No tented circus came close to that figure. Thomas Parkinson, has written of the indoor circus: "Once the threadbare cousins, now they represent the strength in the business."<sup>35</sup>

Thus the frontier has been responsible for both fostering and ending the great boom period of circus history, and in recent years has been the dominant factor in the decline of the tented circus. It can be postulated that if this trend in urban (and suburban) growth continues, it will bring about the demise of the tented circus, and bring the American circus back to its original eighteenth century model of an indoor exhibition. If the circus is to survive, it must realize this situation, and adjust.

#### FOOTNOTES

- 1 George L. Chindahl, *A History of the Circus in America* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1959), p. 118, considers 1880-1920 as the golden age. Earl Chapin May, *The Circus from Rome to Ringling* (New York: Duffield and Green, 1932), pp. 224-235, places the golden age between 1871 and 1920, as do Charles Phillip Fox and Thomas Parkinson, *The Circus in America* (Waukesha, Wisconsin: Country Beautiful, 1969), pp. 78-92. All estimates revolve around important dates in the growth of the Barnum, Bailey and Ringling circuses. The year 1871 was the first for the P. T. Barnum Circus, 1880 was the year that Barnum

and James A. Bailey joined forces, and 1920 was the last year that the Ringling Bros., Barnum and Bailey Circus featured a free street parade. Unfortunately all histories estimate the golden age in terms of the Barnum, Bailey, and Ringling shows, and not the institution as a whole. Although all the histories consider the years 1910-1920 as the last decade of the golden age, the great decline in the institution had already begun.

- 2 Chindahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 240-272. Charles Gates Sturtevant, *Who's Who in the American Circus*, (Rochelle, Illinois: W. H. Hohenadel Printing Co. Inc., 1964), pp. 29-41.
- 3 Marcello Truzzi, "The Decline of the American Circus: The Shrinkage of an Institution," in *Sociology in Everyday Life*, ed. by Marcello Truzzi (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 314-322. Thomas Parkinson, "1967 Circus Season in Review," *Bandwagon*, January-February, 1968, pp. 18-19.
- 4 Alan S. Downer, ed., *The Memoir of John Durang* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1966), pp. 47-93.
- 5 Chindahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-22.
- 6 John M. Brown, "Famous Elephant Killed when Circus Visited Maine in 1816," *Lewiston Journal*, Lewiston, Maine, (28 July 1945).
- 7 Cincinnati Advertiser, 21 December 1819, p. 3. Richard E. Conover, *Give 'Em a John Robinson*, (Xenia, Ohio: Author, 1965), p. 14.
- 8 Chindahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-26.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 10 May, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.
- 11 Chindahl, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 72.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- 16 Frost mms. in possession of the late Richard E. Conover, Xenia, Ohio. Conover had a collection of approximately twenty letters written by Frost during the years 1860-1880.
- 17 *The Gazette*, Zanesville, Ohio, 11 April 1849, p. 3.
- 18 Chindahl, *op. cit.*, p. 65.
- 19 Richard E. Conover, *The Circus: Wisconsin's Unique Heritage* (Baraboo, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1967), pp. 17-29.
- 20 Chindahl, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 Joseph S. Rettinger, "Arizona Circus Memories," *White Tops*, (July-August, 1969), p. 3.
- 23 *Billboard*, 10 March 1910.
- 24 James A. Bailey, "The Best Show Country," *Dramatic News Circus Special*, 1895, p. 17. Copy of magazine in Pfening collection.
- 25 Conover, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11; Chindahl, *op. cit.*, p. 97-101.
- 26 Sturtevant, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-41; Chindahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 240-272.
- 27 Charles E. Cory, *Route Book of the Great Wallace Shows* (Columbus, Ohio: Nitschke Bros. Press, 1896), p. 36.
- 28 The John Grace collection of circus routes sustains this. Collection now part of that of the late Richard E. Conover, Xenia, Ohio.
- 29 The original contract is part of the Louis Cooke mms. now owned by Harold Dunn, Sarasota, Florida. The MacCaddon mms., Princeton, also has a copy. At the great gathering of showmen at the Forepaugh-Sells auction on 10 January 1905, Bailey, W. W. Cole, the Ringlings and John Robinson met to decide routing questions. Apparently nothing came of this meeting, but it does show that other circus men believed it was time to start creating local monopolies. See "Big Showmen Getting Together," *Columbus Dispatch*, 10 January 1905, p. 1.
- 30 *Ibid.*
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 Louis Cooke mms. The Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin, also has some copies of the contracts.
- 34 This fact was made public in a pamphlet released by the show this year to the members of the three circus fan groups, The Circus Fans Association, The Circus Model Builders, and the Circus Historical Society.
- 35 Parkinson, "1967 Season," *op. cit.*, p. 18.



# The Golden Age Of Wild West Shows

## Influence of These Dazzling Spectacles Upon The Imagery and Legendry of the West

By Don Russell

*The following article is a reprint of talk given by Don Russell before a meeting on January 26, 1970, in Chicago, Illinois, of the Chicago Corral of "The Westerners." Russell is the editor of the Westerners Brand Book and the article appeared in the February, 1970, issue of that publication. Russell is the author of **The Wild West: A History of Wild West Shows** published by the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, Fort Worth, Texas. We thank Mr. Russell and the Westerners Brand Book for permission to reprint the article. A few minor corrections and additions have been made by the Bandwagon Editor.*

When I was asked by the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, Fort Worth, Texas, to write a book on Wild West Shows to accompany an exhibition of posters and memorabilia, I was concerned to keep out of it as much as possible the name of Col. William F. Cody, for I had already written "The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill." Buffalo Bill's Wild West was not the only Wild West Show; we listed 115 of them and undoubtedly missed many. They range from the large and important outdoor shows to very small ones, including the "concerts," after-shows, and other combinations with circuses. (For Chicago Corral I will also soft-pedal Miller Bros. 101 Ranch, one of the biggest, and so ably presented to us recently by George Virgines.)

The Buffalo Bill-Dr. Carver Wild West and Rocky Mountain Prairie Exhibition of 1883 was one of the earliest shows. A group of cowboys on that show are pictured here. Pfening Collection.

But it is hard to keep Buffalo Bill out of anything written about Wild West shows — it reminds me of the trouble David Copperfield's Mr. Dick had in writing anything that somehow did not get around to the head of King Charles I. A long time ago an old time showman and collector told me that Buffalo Bill was the only person to invent an entirely American form of entertainment. I have tested that claim over the years and find nothing to controvert it. Many of you know that Fulton did not invent the steamboat, that Edison did not invent electric lighting, that certainly Henry Ford did not invent the automobile. In each case the man who was successful with an idea many had experimented with, gets most of the credit, and justly so.

The Wild West Show developed into the continuing sport and exhibition of rodeo, and their beginnings are intertwined. In 1847 Capt. Mayne Reid, himself a considerable contributor to the Western legend with his books for boys "The Scalp Hunters" and "The Rifle Rangers" wrote from Santa Fe: "This round-up is a great time for the cowhands, a Donnybrook fair it is indeed. They contest with each other for the best roping and throwing, and there are horse races and whiskey and wines."

In 1843 a herd of buffalo was exhibited at the dedication of Bunker Hill monument. P. T. Barnum bought the herd, took it to Hoboken, and advertised a "Grand Buffalo Hunt" — all free, only Barnum had chartered all ferryboats. Tyler's Indian Exhibition toured in the 1850's and its combinations with Van Ambergh, Dan Stone, and Mabie Brothers might be considered either the

first Wild West concert with a circus or the first Wild West and Far East combined. In 1860 Barnum backed Grizzly Adams (James Capen Adams) in a New York show of grizzly bears and other animals. Bronco busting was featured at a July 4 celebration in Deer Trail, Colorado, in 1869, and wild steer riding at Cheyenne, July 4, 1872. Wild Bill Hickok staged a buffalo hunt with Indians at Niagara Falls in 1872.

Also in 1872 Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack (John B. Omohundro) were persuaded by Ned Buntline (Edward Zane Carroll Judson) to appear on the stage in a melodrama based on a Ned Buntline dime novel. Ned Buntline quit after one season, Wild Bill substituted for a few weeks. Eventually Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack went their separate ways, but Buffalo Bill continued in melodrama for eleven seasons, and there is some indication that his entertainment was sometimes called a Wild West show.

However when Cody was asked to stage an "Old Glory Blow-Out" July 4, 1882, in his home town of North Platte, Nebraska, its unexpected success astounded him. An eye witness told me that he then and there decided to take such a show on the road and to call it a Wild West show.

The Wild West had its first performance at Omaha Fair Grounds May 19, 1883. Cody had taken as partner Dr. William Frank Carver, a practicing dentist who billed himself as "champion shot of the world" and "Evil Spirit

The Pawnee Bill Wild West was the largest on tour while the Buffalo Bill show was in Europe. Photo from Ringling Museum of the Circus.







of the Plains." Doc Carver also claimed to be originator of the Wild West show idea, but Doc made many exaggerated claims.

From the start the Wild West had most of the acts that became standard — the attack on the Deadwood stage coach, the riding of the Pony Express, and "Cow-Boys' Fun," with bucking broncos, roping steer riding, and the events that developed into rodeo. There was much shooting and horse racing. The spectacle — "specs" to the show world — was "A Grand Hunt on the Plains" with buffalo, elk, deer, mountain sheep, wild horses, and longhorns.

There was also an all-star cast. Major Frank North, who had commanded the Pawnee Scouts in the Indian wars, was in charge of the Indians. He brought along as interpreter Gordon William Lillie who was to become Major Lillie, Pawnee Bill. Captain Adam Bogardus, "champion pigeon shot of America," made his reputation in shooting passenger pigeons, but was a pioneer in the use of clay pigeons that developed into the sport of skeet shooting. His four sons were featured in his shooting act. From North Platte came Buck Taylor, "King of the Cowboys" and hero of the first dime novels about cowboys. Also from North Platte came a youngster, Johnny Baker, soon to be billed as "The Cow-Boy Kid" and outstanding rifle shot. John Burke, general manager noted as one of the greatest of press agents, and Jule Keen, treasurer, came from the Buffalo Bill Theatrical Combination.

Springfield, Illinois, was the second stop, and the show went on to Chicago, Boston, Hartford, Newport, and Coney Island. The tour was moderately successful, but at its close Cody and Carver parted, the immediate reason being that Carver wanted to continue a winter tour. Property and assets were divided. Carver recruited as partner Captain Jack Crawford, the "Poet Scout," and they showed in Atlanta, Nashville, New Orleans, and other Southern cities. Thus a second Wild West show got its start. It continued until 1885 with J. J. McCafferty listed as owner and manager.

Cody formed a new partnership with Bogardus and Nate Salsbury. Salsbury

The white ticket wagon of the Buffalo Bill show was of a design like those used on the Barnum & Bailey show and may have been interchanged with other B & B equipment. This wagon may be the one at the Circus World Museum, that was last used on the Robbins Bros. Circus. Pfening Collection.

was a successful theatrical performer and toured twelve years, including a trip to Australia, with a group called "The Troubadours." He had proposed partnership with Cody the year before, and af-

**DR. CARVER**  
1894

CHAMPION SHOT OF THE WORLD, AND HIS

**GREAT WILD WEST SHOW**

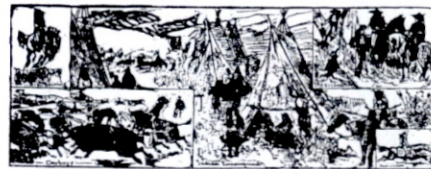
**WILD TEXAS**  
**Indians! Cow Boys**



**A TROUPE OF GENUINE INDIANS**

From the Pawnee, Sioux, Winnebago and Omaha Tribes!

Arizona Cow-Boys; Herds of Wild Horses, Steers and Bkks



**The Original Deadwood Stage Coach**

GRAND SHAM BATTLE between the Scouts, headed by Dr. Carver, and the Indians, representing the attack made by the Indians upon the Stage Coach!

THE PONY EXPRESS, Breaking Wild Horses, Running up a herd of Wild Texas Steers, the Indians on the Warpath.

A MARVELOUS EXHIBITION of Shot-gun and Rifle Shooting, on foot and on horseback, by DR. CARVER, the Champion All-Round-Shot of the World.

**At the Vincennes Fair Grounds,**  
**MONDAY, TUESDAY, MAY 19 AND 20**

**Grand Street Parade Monday**

Gates Open at 1 P. M. Fun Begins at 4 P. M.  
Admission 50c; Children 25c.

terward claimed the Wild West as his idea. However, as he expained his idea as a show that would "embody the whole subject of horsemanship" it translates as the "Congress of Rough Riders of the World" that was featured in the show after 1893.

When Salsbury visited the show-lot during rehearsal that spring, he found Cody engaged in a drinking bout with Dr. Frank Powell, called White Beaver, an army surgeon who became a dime novel hero, and other cronies. Salsbury left a letter for Cody to read, and from this grows a persistent legend that Nate limited Cody to one, or ten, or twelve drinks a day (depending on which version you read) which Cody took in the largest available glassware. However, Cody's promise is on file and it reads: "This drinking surely ends today and your pard will be himself, and on the job all the time." The evidence indicates that Cody never missed a performance because of being drunk, but also that he did not hesitate to write Nate that "when the show laid up for winter I am going to get on a drunk that is a drunk." The answer is that Cody was a periodic drinker; as a friend of his once told me, "he didn't take a drink just to get his mouth wet." When the time for drinking came, he went all out.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West went into the second season with an all star cast. Captain David L. Payne was advertised, but probably was too busy as Oklahoma Boomer to make many appearances (he died that fall). Con Groner, the "Cow-Boy Sheriff of the Platte," John Y. Nelson, Buck Taylor, Major North, Johnny Baker, were others. The season was successful and it was decided to play the World's Industrial and Cotton Exposition at New Orleans that winter. On the way, the showboat carrying the outfit was sunk in a Mississippi River collision. Some of the property was salvaged and the show reorganized, only to play through 44 days of rain — a near-disaster for any outdoor show. Yet there was an unexpected bright spot. One day performers in Sells Brothers Circus had an off day and came to see the Wild West. Among them were Mr. and Mrs. Frank Butler, who liked what they saw and determined to join the Buffalo Bill show. Mrs. Butler was known professionally as Annie Oakley.

Annie Oakley was the greatest personality developed by Wild West shows. Even yet her name rings loud and clear in American folklore. Buffalo Bill, the only other name universally recognized, had many other claims to fame, but Annie's sole attainments were in show business. An unknown when she joined the Wild West in early 1885, she soon became "America's sweetheart" and the symbol of the woman marksman. And the cards thrown into the air as her targets became the symbol for compli-



mentary tickets to shows everywhere — punched full of holes for recognition in gate receipts.

Annie Oakley's revival in comic books, television, and even in the Rogers and Hammerstein "Annie Get Your Gun" was more a recognition of her enduring fame than addition to it.

Sitting Bull, who had dubbed Annie Oakley "Little Sure Shot" joined the show in 1885, his only season. A tour of Canada climaxed a highly successful season—it was in Montreal that William Notman took the photographs of Sitting Bull with Buffalo Bill. The Wild West opened the 1886 season in the big time. Madison Garden was leased from Adam Forepaugh, and Steele Mackaye, a notable name in theatre, wrote the scenario for a pageant-like "spec" called "The Drama of Civilization." An even greater triumph was scored the following year when Buffalo Bill's Wild West dominated the American Exhibition at Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in London. Royalty, and everyone else, flocked to the arena and at the command performance for Jubilee guests, the Deadwood coach carried four kings — Leopold II of Belgium, Christian IX of Denmark, George I of Greece, and Albert of Saxony—with the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII), and Cody driving. When the Prince remarked that Cody had never held such a poker hand before, Cody answered (in the version I like best): "Four kings and a Royal Joker makes a royal flush as no man every held before."

Cody's huge success in England stimulated the first large-scale competition. The Golden Age of the Circus reached a peak in 1885 with 50 outdoor shows on the road. There were three or four Wild West shows that year in addition to that of Carver and Crawford, but none that made any mark. In 1887 Adam Forepaugh, who had seen Buffalo Bill's

The Two-Bills show used this very unusual truck for advertising. It contained a generator and had numerous flashing electric lights. Harold Dunn Collection.



The greatest of all women wild west show stars was Annie Oakley, shown here while featured by the Young Buffalo and Col. Cummins show. Frank Pouska Collection.

successful pageantry at Madison Square Garden, sought to imitate it. Captain Adam Bogardus put on a Wild West there in the 1887 spring show. Forepaugh was one of the great names in circus business. There are those who remember the Adam Forepaugh and Sells Brothers Circus as one of the three big ones. In 1887 Adam Forepaugh's New and Greatest All-feature Show added a spec of Custer's Last Rally — Buffalo Bill was doing a similar spec in London, and for two years "4-paw's Wild West" starred D. W. F. Carver. A courier for this show featured a portrait of Custer on its colored cover. Carver went off on his own after 1888, but the Combined Wild West and Forepaugh Exhibitions continued for an-

other year. Adam Forepaugh died in 1890. His show was bought by James A. Bailey and James E. Cooper and became circus again. Forepaugh's contribution to the Wild West was forgotten.

Another big-time show got its start in 1888 — the Pawnee Bill Historical Wild West Exhibition and Indian Encampment. Major Lillie, who had been with Buffalo Bill the first year, contracted to put on a show for an exposition in Belgium. The death of Emperor Wilhelm I of Germany caused its cancelation. Pawnee Bill tried an American tour without much success until he met Annie Oakley in Philadelphia. Annie had quit the Buffalo Bill show in London for a shooting tour of European capitals, so was at liberty. With backing from Charles E. Southwell of Philadelphia and Annie Oakley as star, the Pawnee Bill show finished the season, but then was attached by the sheriff. Lillie was rescued to become Payne's successor in the Oklahoma Boomer movement. He got back into show business in 1890 and from then on Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West was one of the big ones.

There were others, Buckskin Joe, Edward Jonathon Hoyt, who had led the band during Pawnee Bill's first season, put on Buckskin Joe's Realistic Wild West in Crescent Park in Providence, Rhode Island. Dr. Carver's Wild America landed in Hamburg, Germany, in 1889, and after a tour of Europe took off for Australia. There he tried a combination of outdoor show in afternoons and stage melodrama at nights, and brought that idea back to America. Wild America lasted until 1893, but Carver continued in show business. His driving horses — jumping 40 feet with girl rider into a tank of water — were long famous at state fairs, and the act was continued by his daughter Lorena Carver.

A small over land wild west show was the Daniel Boone show, whose entire personell is shown here. Pfening Collection.







Buffalo Bill's Wild West returned to Europe in 1889, opening in Paris, and continued its tour of the Continent and England through 1892. During 1893 it played the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago for what has been called the most successful year in outdoor show business. The 1894 season was spent at Ambrose Park, South Brooklyn, New York, Nate Salsbury became ill and never resumed active management. A deal was made with James A. Bailey, of Barnum & Bailey, to provide transportation to tour the show. This was the first time Buffalo Bill's Wild West took the road for a tour of the United States that included a great many one-day stands. These tours continued from 1895 through 1902.

Meanwhile opposition was growing. Pawnee Bill got to Europe in 1894 for the International Industrial and Fine Arts Exhibition at Antwerp. The show toured the Netherlands and France before returning to the United States. Among others were Sutton's American Wild West and Roman Hippodrome; O'Dell's Famous Hippodrome and F. J. McCarthy's Arizona Wild West; and Kennedy Bros. XIT Ranch Wild West. "Brothers" became almost a fixture in circus names, but Kemp Sisters Wild West, which flourished around 1896, presaged the battle for women's rights.

The Pawnee Bill show appears to have the honor of being the first tented wild west show to make one day stands, framed like a railroad circus.

The Pawnee Bill show of 1891 was a few years ahead of the 1895 James A. Bailey framed Buffalo Bill show. By 1893 the Pawnee show was moving on 11 railroad cars. The show had moved on 9 cars in 1892. The 1893 route book of the show lists the following equipment. One advance car; four 60 foot flat cars, three 60 foot stock cars; two 60 foot sleeping cars and one box car for baggage.

One \$1,800 bandwagon; one Barouche; two Prairie Schooners; one Concord Stage Coach; one \$1,200 ticket wagon; one pole wagon; one stake and chain

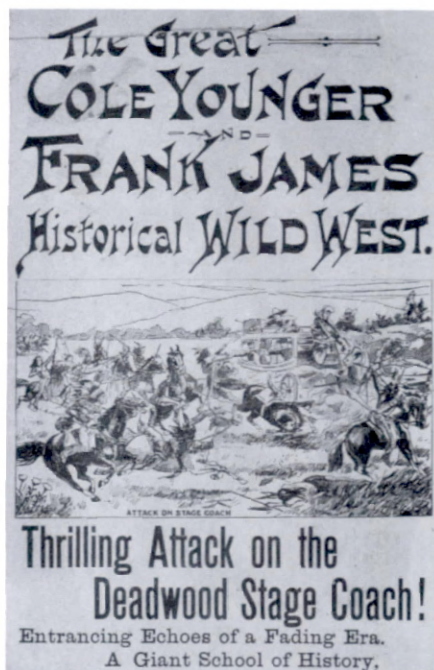
The Indian Bill show's midway is pictured at a stand in Waterbury, Conn., on July 4, 1903. Pfening Collection.

wagon; one oil wagon; one cookhouse wagon; one reserve seat wagon; one jack wagon; two seat wagons; two 12 pound Rifle Cannons on carriages; one ox cart; two 4 horse chariots and two 2 horse chariots.

Eighty bronchos, forty large baggage horses, four Texas steers, four buffalos and two Mexican burros. (There is no mention of riding horses.)

The big show canvas was an arena 350 feet long by 200 feet wide with a 14 foot high sidewall. The canopy over the seats was 30 feet deep and covered three sides of the arena. There was a

The front of a courier for the 1903 Cole Younger & Frank James Wild West used stock cuts, the back side has drawings of Younger and James. Pfening Collection.



twenty foot square canopy for the 12 piece Mexican band. The show carried one 20 foot round top used as a dressing tent. There was one Ammunition wall tent. Two 100 foot horse tents were used as well as a 50 foot round top with one 60 foot middle used as the side show top.

The 1893 Pawnee Bill Wild West Show carried a six piece Indian band, as well as 19 additional Indians. There were five cowboys and five Mexican riders, as well as a six man Arabian acrobatic troupe.

The show opened in Hagerstown, Maryland on April 29 and closed November 4 in Alexandria, Virginia.

One of the big events for Buffalo Bill's Wild West was Cody Day at the Trans-Mississippi Exposition at Omaha, August 31, 1898. Cody was greeted by Alexander Majors of Pony Express fame, Edward Creighton, who built the first telegraph line across the Plains, and other notables. The exposition also started another top showman on his way. An Indian Congress, representing 31 tribes, was managed by Col. Frederic T. Cummins, with the backing of the Indian Bureau, which permitted Geronimo and other Apache prisoners of war to take part. The Omaha fair and its Indian Congress was continued through 1900. The famous Indian portraits of F. A. Rinehart were photographed during this period. Cummins organized an Indian Congress for the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo in 1901. Among his notables were Red Cloud and Calamity Jane — the only known appearance of Calamity Jane in an outdoor show. Cummins' Indian Congress toured in 1902 and 1903, with Chief Joseph of the Nez Percés as his star attraction at Madison Square Garden in 1903. Cummins then organized an even greater Indian Congress, representing 51 tribes, for the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis in 1904. Cummins went on the road again in 1905 and 1906, adding Wild West and circus acts to his ethnological exhibition, and from 1907 to 1911 toured Europe as Cummins' Wild West and Indian Congress.

One show that should not be overlooked because of the notoriety of its personnel was the Cole Younger and Frank James Wild West of 1903. Cole had been paroled after conviction in the Northfield bank robbery. Cases against Frank James had been nol prossed for lack of evidence. Their show attracted too many grifters to be successful.

The Luella Forepaugh Fish Wild West (1903) was an echo of Adam Forepaugh's venture — Luella was his daughter. It featured a Custer's Last Fight spec, staged by Charles H. Tompkins, who later staged the Custer spec in Tompkins Wild West and Frontier Exhibition, 1913-17. In an early issue of *The Westerners Brand Book* (October, 1956) we had an article by Tomp-



kins on Gabriel Brothers Champion Long Distance Riders Wild West of 1904.

The first two decades of the twentieth century was the heyday of the Wild West show. Many were small, playing county fairs and carnivals. Some of the more interesting and colorful titles were: Julian Allen; Arizona Joe's (1913); Broncho John; Buckskin Bill; Bee Ho Gray; Boone's; Black Hills, 3 cars (1914); Canada Frank (1905); Cherokee Ed; Diamond Bar Ranch; Diamond Four (1909-11); Deadwood Dick's 3 cars (1906); Dakota Max D. M. Ranch; (1919); Hattie Belle's Pride of the West; T. K. Kendrey's Great Indian Congress (1913); Lone Star May's Frontier Exhibition (1908-09); Mexican Billies (1891-92); McDonald's Great Buffalo (1902) Montana Belle (1913); Blanch McKinney (1909); Navajo Ned (1909); Oklahoma Ranch 17 cars (1913); Princess Winona (1919); Prairie Lillie & Nebraska Bill 10 cars (1912); Capt. C. W. Riggs 2 cars (1909); Texas Bill; Texas Bud 2 cars (1912); Col. W. J. Uden 2 cars (1908); Younger Bros. 5 cars (1906) and Wyoming Bill 5 cars (1906).

The season of 1910 may have been the largest on record as far as number of wild west shows on tour, a total of eighteen. On rails that year were Buffalo Bill - Pawnee Bill on 59 cars; Miller Bros. 101 Ranch, 27 cars; Jones Bros. Buffalo Ranch, 17 cars; Young Buffalo, 21 cars; Dickey's Circle D, 12 cars; Tiger Bill (Snyder), 11 cars; California Frank (Hafley), 11 cars and Lone Bill, 10 cars. Others that were either one and two car outfits or muders were George M. Burk, Moores, Prairie Lillie, Kings IXL Ranch, Kemp's Colorado Grant's, Carlises' (Wichita Jack), Buckskin Ben, Kennedy's XIT Ranch and Zack Mulhall.

The National Editorial Association was entertained at Miller Bros. 101 Ranch in Oklahoma in 1905 with a roundup featuring Geronimo. The event was so successful and so well publicized that the Miller Brothers were invited to organize a "Real Wild West" for the Jamestown Tercentenary Exposition in 1907. On their way they put on a show at the Chicago Coliseum so successfully that they were asked to put together a second show for Brighton Beach, New York. In 1908 Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Real Wild West took to the road as a railroad show and one of the big ones. One of its stars was Bill Pickett, the Negro cowboy who invented the rodeo event of bulldogging a steer.

Another was Lucille Mulhall, called the first cowgirl, who was roper and broncho rider. Her father starred her for a time in Col. Zack Mulhall's Wild West, (1910) it was in this show that Will Rogers got his start in show business. Tom Mix got his start on the 101 Ranch. Another was Guy Weadick, who started the Calgary Stampede in 1912.



The entire company of the Buffalo Bill show assembled on Feb. 26, 1903 at Olympia, in London, England, to celebrate William Cody's birthday. Pfening Collection.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West opened its last European tour in London, Dec. 26, 1902. The show traded railroad trains with the Barnum & Bailey Circus, which returned to the United States, and made a long tour of the Great Britain and the Continent, lasting through 1906. It was highly successful at Paris in 1905. But there were downs as well as ups, including an outbreak of glanders that destroyed 200 of the show's 300 horses. Nate Salesbury died two days before the London opening in 1902. Bailey died at the beginning of the 1906 season. Cody returned to the United States in 1907, heavily indebted to the Salesbury and Bailey estates. However he put a show together for its first American tour in five years, doing good business in 1907 and 1908. Then to eliminate the Bailey Estate interest a combination was made with Pawnee Bill.

Lillie had restyled his show as Pawnee Bill's Historic Wild West and Great

The program of the 1911 Seaver's Young Buffalo Wild West was printed in red and black. Pfening Collection.

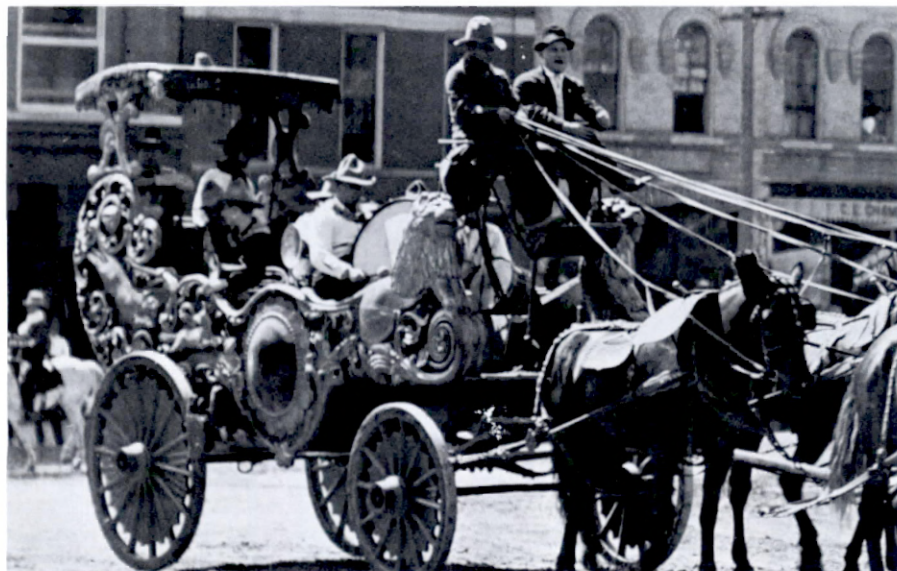


Far East, which meant "an ethnological congress of strange tribes," including Hindu Magicians, Australian boomerang throwers, Singhalese dancers, and of course, elephants and camels. The new show became Buffalo Bill's Wild West Combined with Pawnee Bill's Great Far East. Those who worked in it called it the "Two Bills Show" and remembered it affectionately for its days of prosperity, as a happy show. The 1909 season went well, and Cody announced his retirement at the beginning of the 1910 season. However, he extended his series of "Farewell Exhibitions" until they became notorious. In 1913 the show was foreclosed by Harry H. Tammen of the Denver Post who had made Cody a loan in the hope of inveigling him into a combination with his Sells-Floto Circus. Cody toured in 1913 and 1914 with Sells Floto Circus and Buffalo Bill's Wild West.

The Two Bills Show inspired imitation. Vernon C. Seavers, owner of a theater and an amusement park in Peoria, Illinois, put together a Lone Bill Wild West for his Al Fresco Park in 1908, and toured it to a few Illinois cities in two railroad cars. In 1909 he changed the name to Young Buffalo Wild West—the part of Young Buffalo was played successively by Cal Lavelle and Joe R. Smith. By 1910 thirty cars were needed to move the show, including side show and parade wagons. In 1910 he signed up Annie Oakley. Annie had returned to the Buffalo Bill show in 1889 and remained until she was seriously injured in a train wreck at the end of the 1902 season. This was her first return to outdoor show business, and she stayed with Seaver for three seasons. In 1911 Colonel Cummins Wild West Indian Congress returned from its European tour and in 1912 merged with Seaver to become the Young Buffalo Wild West and Col. Fred Cummins' Far East Combined. That year the show played Chicago for two weeks at a different lot each night.

Wild West shows stimulated the type of vent that became rodeo. Oldest is Cheyenne Frontier Days, started in 1897. In 1898 Buffalo Bill's Wild West was its featured attraction. In 1902 a famous bucking horse, Steamboat, began his





career of tossing off would-be riders at Cheyenne. Steamboat is the only horse that became a top star in a Wild West show. Irwin Bros. Cheyenne Frontier Days Wild West of 1913 was built around Steamboat.

Miller Bros. took the 101 Ranch show to England in 1914 for the Anglo-American Exposition at Shepherd's Bush, London. It was a big success — until the outbreak of World War I in August. Then the horses and vehicles of the show were impressed for public service. Zack T. Miller begged off six trick horses and booked passage for show people wherever it could be found. Miller Bros. reorganized for 1915 with Jess Willard, world's heavyweight champion, as star attraction.

In 1916 Buffalo Bill cut loose from the Sells-Floto Circus and the show became Buffalo Bill (Himself) and 101

A number of new wagons for the 1911 Indian Pete's Wild West show are pictured at the Beggs factory. This show went into the Hall Farm following its closing. Beggs Photo.

The Sells Bros. Circus shell bandwagon is shown here in a 1911 photo of the Young Buffalo Wild West parade in Monroe, Wis. Ben Kubly Collection.

Ranch Wild West, Combined, with the Military Pageant Preparedness. By some coincidence Jess Willard toured with the Sells Floto Circus that year. In Chicago the Buffalo Bill - 101 Ranch show turned itself into a Shan-Kive and Roundup, another link between Wild West show and rodeo, although the word rodeo appeared only obscurely in the program, with the explanation that it was another word for round-up.

Col. Cody died Jan. 10, 1917, shortly after the tour ended. The show was reorganized for 1917 as Jess Willard (Himself in the flesh) and the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show and Circus on 28 cars. When it ended its tour that war year no big Wild West show was extant.

World War I marked the end of the golden era of outdoor show business. The great free street parade was nearly a casualty of city traffic with only a

few circuses continuing to make the downtown procession. The horse-and- buggy days were over; shows became motorized. One of the early experiments with a motorized show was Charles H. Tompkins whose Tompkins Wild West and Frontier Exhibition made its final tour in 1917 on trucks.

The motion picture was beginning to cut into all forms of live entertainment. However, rodeo had an explosion of popularity, helped along by the annual Chicago Rodeo staged by Tex Austin (John Van Austin) from 1925 through 1928. The Rodeo Association of America dates from 1929 and the Rodeo Cowboy Association from 1936.

The Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Real Wild West came back, bigger and better than ever, in 1925 and lasted until 1931, featuring such stars as Ezra Meeker, of Oregon Trail fame, Hank Durnell, Tad Lucas, and "Suicide Ted" Elder, Roman-riding two horses—standing with one foot on each horse — and leaping them over an automobile. Jack Hoxie of movie fame was featured in 1930. Zack T. Miller, the last surviving Miller brother, kept trying at Chicago's A Century of Progress World's Fair of 1933, in California in 1945 and 1946, in the Southeast in 1949. He kept trying until his death Jan. 3, 1952.

There were others—Wheeler Bros., Tiger Bill, Allen Bros., and Buck Jones. Stars of movie Westerns were frequently employed for circus "concert" or after-show. Ken Maynard organized Maynard's Diamond K Ranch Wild West and Circus in 1936 and in 1938 was top-billed with Clyde Beatty in Cole Bros. Circus. Tom Mix was headliner with the Sells-Floto Circus in 1929, 1930 and 1931 and headed his own Tom Mix Circus for four seasons, 1935-38 Hoot Gibson, who had been featured in one of Tex Austin's

The new air calliope wagon of the Irwin Bros. Wild West is shown in front of the Beggs Wagon Co., in Kansas City, Mo., Beggs Photo.







The finest new wild west show or circus, equipment-wise, to ever open was the Col. Tim McCoy Real Wild West in 1938. The full string of loaded flats is shown here. Pfening Collection.

rodeos, had the after-show with Robbins Bros. Circus in 1938.

Last in the big time was Col. Tim McCoy, an authentic cowboy and authentic colonel. He was also a brigadier general as adjutant general of Wyoming. Tim McCoy was a movie star for ten years and for three years, 1935-37, had the concert Wild West with the Ringling Bros.-Barnum & Bailey Circus. In 1938 he organized Col. Tim McCoy's Real Wild West and Rough Riders of the World, the last all-new railroad show. It opened April 14 in Chicago's International Amphitheatre in spectacular splendor. It played Columbus, Dayton, Cincinnati, Parkersburg, and Washington, D.C., and there it died of lack of funds, after less than a month on the road. Timothy J. McCoy, however, never stopped. He was playing the after-show for the Carson & Barnes and Kelly Miller Circuses a few years ago and is still on the road.

Is the Wild West show obsolete? The continuing popularity of Rodeo, its legitimate successor, refutes it. Most of the events at Cheyenne, Calgary, Pendleton were on the programs of Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Miller Bros. 101 Ranch. But more important is the long-term impact. The Wild West show dramatized the American West as a place of romance and glamour long before Owen Wister's "The Virginian" or Zane Grey; long before "The Great Train Robbery" took the Western into the movies, and of course before television was dreamed of.

The glamour of the West can be traced back to the novels of Fenimore Cooper — he wrote "The Prairie" as well as "The Last of the Mohicans," to the dime novels of Edward S. Ellis, and the Buffalo Bill's stage melodramas, but the cowboy was no hero until Buffalo Bill introduced Buck Taylor as "King of the Cowboys" and Prentiss Ingraham wrote a series of dime novels making Buck Taylor the first cowboy hero in fiction.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West can be



The last under canvas wild west show to tour in the United States was the Tiger Bill Real Wild West, operated by Tiger Bill Synder. The year was 1952. Tom Parkinson Photo.

credited with much else—with helping to save the buffalo from extinction, for example, with assist from other show people such as Buffalo Jones and Pawnee Bill. Buffalo Bill's wild west made a hero of the Indian horseman of the Plains — and gave him gainful employment although do-gooders of the

Ken Maynard's Diamond K Ranch Wild West had a short life in 1936 and operated over a few weekends at Maynard's ranch in Van Nuys. Pfening Collection.

**MAGAZINE and DAILY REVIEW**

THE WORLD'S GREATEST WILD WEST SHOW

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time denounced the Wild West shows for encouraging the Indian to retain some elements of his native Indian culture.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West glamorized the American West in Europe — with help from Carver, Pawnee Bill, Cummins, Miller Bros. and other shows that went there. The effect is still quite evident in Germany, France, England, Spain, and Italy.

I have indicated elsewhere that Buffalo Bill was an authentic Western hero. In these days of no illusions and no heroes, perhaps we should recall that once we had both, and were happier. Buffalo Bill's cowboy fun was an event that might merit revival.

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AND  
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# Buffalo Bill's Wild West, Yesterday and Today!

By Art Stensvad

The stately old gentleman in buckskins, leather breeches and white Stetson on a magnificent white stallion rode into the center of the arena. Pulling his horse up before the thousands of spectators in the grandstand, the rider removed his hat and with a sweep that nearly reached the ground, saluted the audience. The gentleman was Wm. F. Cody, worldly known to all as "Buffalo Bill". Date was August 19th, 1911. Location was North Platte, Nebr. Bill Cody was giving his farewell performance to the audience of the town, where the Wild West Show was conceived. Maybe Bill Cody knew it, maybe he did not, but this was the very last time that his great show, Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World would ever set up and exhibit in the town that he had adopted as his home!

In 1869, Bill Cody made his home in a small log cabin located near Ft. McPherson, Nebr. During the following years, Cody purchased land, northwest of the small town of North Platte and also erected a house in the town. The town house, he called "Welcome Wigwam". On his ranch property, he erected buildings and named the ranch "Scout's Rest Ranch". During this period, Cody toured with a stage production. Proceeds and profits from this venture he invested in land around North Platte and the Cody Ranch became a large one.

In 1882, Cody came home to North Platte and decided that a real celebration should be had in the City of North Platte. It is recorded that the city was planning a small celebration, but it was Bill Cody who wanted it outstanding. It is reported that he made the following statement. "Let's make it a real Old Glory Blowout". From this idea, the wildwest format was born! It is record that during the fall of 1882 and early spring of 1883, Bill Cody began to assemble and organize at the Scout's Rest Ranch his "Congress of Rough Riders of The World" and the wildwest display which so many of our fathers and grandfathers, along with the rest of the family enjoyed. It is history that early in 1883, Bill Cody loaded the future wildwest show into "six box cars and a few passenger cars" and headed for Columbus, Nebr. There he was joined with other business partners and they continued their rehearsals and framing of the show.

On May 17, 1883, Buffalo Bill's Wildwest and Congress of Rough Riders of The World opened their premier performance at the fairgrounds in Omaha, Nebr. From there it is history! Cody toured the world with his show, making success full stand after stand. It is on record, the show continued to grow until it reached it's peak size of 59 railroad cars and with a cast of thousands! As it is history of nearly all showmen and Cody was no exception. He built his show to the top and then it began to slip. Down and down it declined. Cody ended his show days with a show titled Buffalo Bill's Wildwest & Pawnee Bill's Far East Shows, known to showfolks as the "Two Bills Show". Cody's career ended on the Sells-Floto Circus where he was featured. Cody died in 1917, leaving a history as colorful as P. T. Barnum, James A. Bailey, Ringling Brothers and many others. Cody will always remain among the top ten show men in the history of outdoor entertainment.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, permit me to introduce to you a Congress of Rough Riders of The World". — The date, July 31, 1971. Location, North Platte, Nebr. The words were Col. Cody's, but the voice was that of Phil McDonald. It was the World's Premier Performance of the new Buffalo Bill's Wildwest and Congress of Rough Riders of The World. What a thrill! The gentleman who rode into the arena, had buckskin jacket,

These 24 sheet billboards dotted the Nebraska countryside during August, 1971 advertising the return of the Buffalo Bill show to North Platte. Art Stensvad Photo.

leather breeches and a white stetson. He rode a magnificent white stallion. His salute to the audience was gracefully executed. No, not Bill Cody, but his replacement on the Montie Montana, Jr. production of Buffalo Bill's Wildwest and Congress of Rough Riders of The World, Bill Hammer from California.

Instead of Bill Sweeney at the helm of the Cowboy Band, a local band instructor, Lawrence Romeiser carried out the chores. Among the noted people with the show are Montie Montana, Jr., producer. Rudy Robbins, company manager, Jack Joyce, whom we all know and respect for his unsurpassed directorship of the 100th. Anniversary program of RBBB Circus and who is now performance director of the Buffalo Bill Show. Tom Blackburn is writer, Mary Will Doss designed the costumes. Michael McGibney is lighting director.

The opening performance was attended by several notables. Governor James Exon, of Nebraska. Mel Steen, former Parks & Game Commission head, who pushed the idea of the wildwest show into reality. Also Dick Schaeffer from the Parks Commission. Also introduced to the public was Willard Barbee, present head of the Games & Parks Dept., Ken Hornbacker, president of Nebraskaland Days, Inc., and other dignitaries.

During the ceremony, Governor Exon proclaimed Bill's Wildwest and Congress of Rough Riders of The World to be official Goodwill Ambassadors of the State of Nebraska. Governor Exon also proclaimed August to be officially known as "Buffalo Bill Month."

The program of the show has improved continuously during the month long stay at the "Wildwest arena" at Scout's Rest Ranch. It is now condensed to a two hour long program and moves rapidly under the directorship of Jack Joyce. The show is well received by the audience, which included several "near straw houses" in the new 4000 capacity stadium. The program; —

Display No. 1 — Overture by Cow-







boy Band. Music improved greatly as time went by.

Display No. 2 — American Buffalo. 10 Bison roaming over arena while announcer explains their early existence. Cowboys drive them out of arena.

Display No. 3 — Grand Entry Maze: Introducing the performers of Buffalo Bill's Wildwest. Presentation of the Colours and band playing "Star Spangled Banner".

Display No. 4 — Indian life on The Plains; Life of the Indians depicted as it was before the coming of the white man. The first white men appear and are greeted by the Indians in friendship.

Display No. 5 — The Pioneers: The coming of the white man heralded the end of the Indian way of life. Indians and white men fight for the possession of the land.

Display No. 6 — Pony Express — Pony Express riders cross the plains, passing a wagon train. Riders are attacked by Indians which are driven off.

Display No. 7 — Indians Attack — A group of hostile Indians attack the wagon train and are repelled and driven off, after a detachment of U. S. Calvary arrive.

Display No. 8.—Special Introduction — (Opening performance) Nebraska

This view shows the layout of the grounds in North Platte. The two pole top on the left is the dressing tent with the five pole horse tent in the center. Art Stensvad Photo.

dignataries and Montie Montana, Jr. introduced to audience.

Display No. 9 — Saturday Night in Town: Dance hall girls arrive in Deadwood Stage and gala time turns to shoot out.

Display No. 10 — Trick Horses: Jan Warvell and "White Feather".

Display No. 11 — Fess Reynolds' Liberty goats.

Display No. 12 — Trick and Fancy Riding, featuring the top trick riders of the World.

Display No. 13 — Jim Warvel, Cowboy Comedian and his trick horse.

Display No. 14 — Longhorn Cattle Drive (24 longhorns) Featuring Mexican Charros — David Cueva and Juan Montana, presenting feats of roping and horsemanship in the style of the Floridors.

Display No. 15 — Attack on the Deadwood Stage. Indians Attack Deadwood

The full company on horseback is shown during the grand entry of the 1971 show. Art Stensvad Photo.

stage and are driven off by U. S. Calvary.

Display No. 16 — Fess Reynolds with his trained Brahma Bull.

Display No. 17 — Australian Whips: John and Vi Brady from New South Wales in a demonstration of the sports and pastimes of Australian Rough Riders "Down Under".

Display No. 18 — Exhibition of Bucking Bronchos: As staged by Buffalo Bill and last performed publicly in the spring of 1913!

Display No. 19 — Four Teams of Roman Standing Riders perform excellently at various feats of Roman Riding.

Display No. 20 — U. S. Calvary Drill Team Display.

Display No. 21 — The Congress of Rough Riders of The World: Romans, Cossacks, Gauchos, Napoleon Calvary, Charros, English Dragoons, German Cuirassiers, Austrailians, Arabs, The Most Beautiful Horsewomen of the World and the Wild West. U. S. Calvary.

Display No. 22—Grand Finale: Entire cast of show in a sweeping display followed by a display of fireworks (night only).

During the near month run of this show, it has been widely accepted by visitors from nearly every State in The Union. One night, I counted cars from 23 states in the parking lot. Show has developed into a tight, well run program. Music, all though not arranged as I would like it, is performed well by Larry Romeiser and local musicians. One musician, Deloyt Young, played trumpet with U. S. Army band for 10 years! Drummer, Terry Ostergaard will be Band Director at Beaver City, Nebr. school this fall! Others in band include, Flute — Janis Grannell, Trumpets — Dan Schmidt, Jan Bachman. Trombones—Lowell Roggow who is going to Eastman School of Music this fall. Hugh Roettger who plays with Sandhills Symphony Orchestra. Baritone—Ronald Roberts; Bass (Tuba)—Kenneth Knolles. A very nice sounding band!

Others on the staff include, Don Heaston, Music Consultant; Mack Matlock, Assistant Arena Director; A "Blue" Reinhardt, Wagon and Stock Manager; Amy Hatch, Road Publicity; Bill Cum-







mings, Road Controller; Mindy Cummings, Controller Secretary; Bea Bryan, Executive Secretary; Debbie Merritt, Secretary; Stan Forrest, Canvas Man; Bill Dorroh, Carpenter and Mike Demetrios, routing director.

Professional performers include; The Didgereodoo (John and Vi Brady) Australian trick ropers and whip artists. Jones Bennally, Navajo Champion Hoop Dancer, Chief Wolf Robe Hunt, Chief of the Indians. Connie Griffith, Queen of the Trick Ropers. Fess Reynolds, clown. Nah Dex Bah (Sherley Harrison) Indian Sign Language.

Present plans call for the Buffalo Bill's Wildwest and Congress of Rough Riders Of the World to start a nationwide tour after completing its engagement in the new Wildwest Arena at Wm. F. Cody's Scout Rest Ranch on August 29th. After this, it is booked into Phoenix for the official premiere on Sept. 8. Then to Anaheim, Los Angeles and San Diego. Undoubtedly, local talent used in the North Platte Production will be replaced by professionals as the opening of the official route draws near.

Show is using few window cards and newspaper advertisements. Also used along the main highways in Nebraska is colorful Buffalo Bill billboard displays. All are the same. I think, improvement could be had in advertising the show, by using more reproduction of old Buffalo Bill posters, including the famous "I Am Coming" poster. I have personally seen the billboards displayed along the highways from Sidney, Nebr. to Lincoln, Nebr. and have seen window cards in Lincoln, Grand Island and Kearney on my travels.

North Platte Souvenir program sells for \$1.00 and is a 22 page booklet in full color. Included is an insert sheet of the program. Articles included are by Nellie Yost, longtime resident of North Platte and Nebraska. Also a short history of the Wildwest by Don Russell. An article on Scout's Rest Ranch by Col. George LeRoy, Superintendent of Scouts Rest Ranch. Illustrations include pic-

The Indian raid upon the wagon train is illustrated in this shot taken during a performance of the new Buffalo Bill show. Photo from Doug Lyon of the show staff.

tures of posters used by Cody, also several photos of the old show itself. A worthy item to add to your collection.

The new wildwest arena was built last fall and this spring by the State of Nebraska to be used for various events, including the Buffalo Bill Rodeo (held in June during Nebraskaland Days Festivities), Wildwest Show in August, circuses and other attractions needing an outdoor arena. Show grounds is not complete, but completion of the grounds, including a paved parking area, outdoor signs advertising the show grounds and other facilities should be finished by Buffalo Bill Wild West time in August, 1972!

Cody's Scouts Rest Ranch is located just north of the new Wildwest arena.

The souvenir program is a real bute. Printed in full color it has a number of lithos from the original show reproduced, it is a collectors item.



To anyone visiting this area, they surely should plan on spending a full day here, to visit the Scout's Rest Ranch and climaxing the day by attending the Wildwest Show! Show is mainly held in evenings, but on Saturday and Sunday, there are afternoon shows. No show on Sunday evening or on Mondays.

History is repeated! In 1911 and again, 60 years later in 1971, the sound over the prairies of Nebraska again is heard the tremendous statement, "Ladies and Gentlemen, permit me to introduce to you a Congress of Rough Riders of The World"!!!!

So, fellow Circus Historians, let me invite you as Col. Cody used to advertise in his heyday of the Wildwest Show. "Come See Me" in 1972 during August for the Greatest wildwest Show on Earth (Pardon me P.T.) and visit the friendliest city in the United States and Canada! Visit the home of Col. Cody and see the re-enactment of his Wildwest show in August 1972!!!



The press pass is a real "Annie Oakley" with a bullet hole on the left. From Doug Lyon of the show staff.

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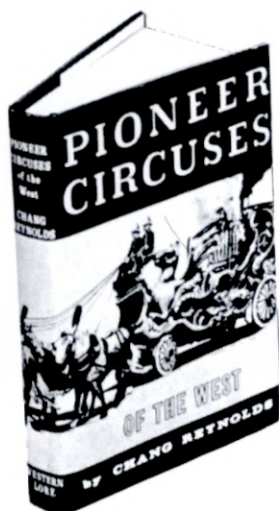
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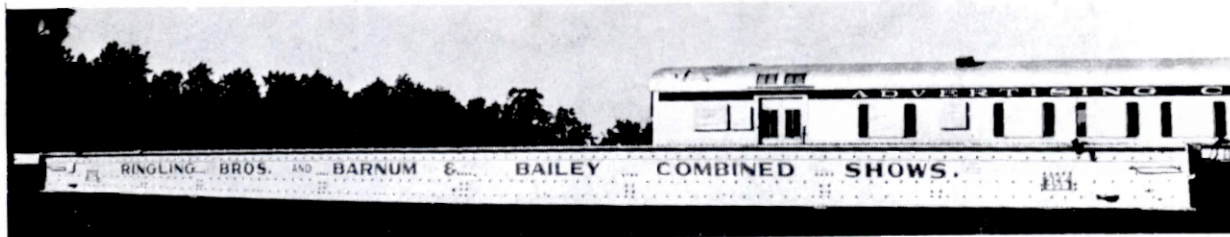
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